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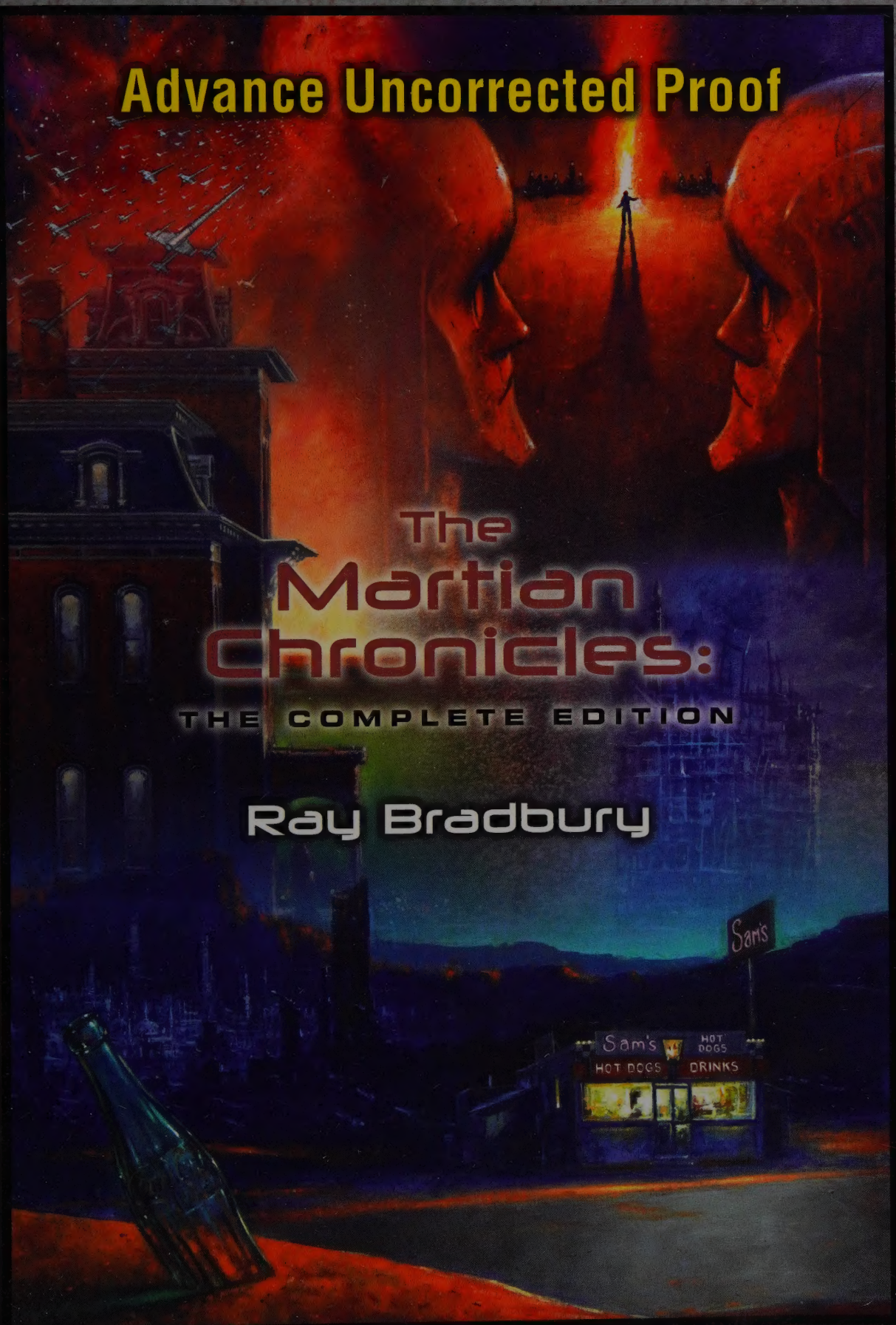

The Martian Chronicles:

THE COMPLETE EDITION

Ray Bradbury

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THE COMPLETE EDITION

The
Martian
Chronicles:
THE COMPLETE EDITION

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THE COMPLETE EDITION

Ray Bradbury

With additional original
introductions and afterwords by

JOHN SCALZI

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Contents

Part One

THE MARTIAN CHRONICLES

Meeting the Wizard, by John Scalzi 13
The Long Road to Mars, Introduction to 40th Anniversary Edition, by Ray Bradbury 17
Green Town, Somewhere on Mars; Mars, Somewhere in Egypt, An Introduction, by Ray Bradbury 21
Rocket Summer 25
Ylla 27
The Summer Night 37
The Earth Men 39
The Taxpayer 51
The Third Expedition 53
— And the Moon Be Still as Bright 65
The Settlers 85
The Green Morning 87
The Locusts 91
Night Meeting 93
The Shore 101
The Fire Balloons 103
Interim 117
The Musicians 119
The Wilderness 121
The Naming of Names 129
Usher II 131
The Old Ones 143
The Martian 145
The Luggage Store 155
The Off Season 157
The Watchers 167
The Silent Towns 169
The Long Years 177
There Will Come Soft Rains 187
The Million-Year Picnic 193

Part Two

ADDITIONAL MATERIALS

How I Wrote My Book, by Ray Bradbury (text version) 203

Part Three

THE OTHER MARTIAN TALES OF RAY BRADBURY

Undiscovered Mars, Unseen Bradbury by Joe Hill 211
The Lonely Ones 215
The Exiles 223
The One Who Waits 233
The Disease 239
Dead of Summer 241
The Martian Ghosts 243
Jemima True 247
They All Had Grandfathers 249
The Stawberry Window 257
Way in the Middle of the Air 265
The Other Foot 275
The Wheel 285
The Love Affair 287
The Marriage 295
The Visitor 299
The Lost City of Mars 309
Holiday 333
Payment in Full 337
The Messiah 343
Night Call, Collect 351
The Blue Bottle 361
Dark They Were, and Golden Eyed 369
Lost Mars, The Unpublished Martian Stories of Ray Bradbury by Marc Scott Zicree 381

Part Four

THE SCREENPLAYS

"For Ray Bradbury" by Richard Matheson 387
The Martian Chronicles, 1963 Screenplay by Ray Bradbury 389
The Martian Chronicles, 1997 Screenplay by Ray Bradbury 579

List of Color Illustrations

The Third Expedition

—And the Moon Be Still as Bright

The Locusts

The Off Season

There Will Come Soft Rains

Dedication—TK

Part One

The Martian Chronicles

Meeting the Wizard

BY JOHN SCALZI

When I was twelve a wizard came to town.

And immediately I have to explain that comment.

First: Quite obviously, the wizard under discussion is Ray Bradbury.

Second: understand that when you are the age you are now, and the age I am now, an author coming to town to talk about his work is no magical thing. The author may be your favorite author, and you may be genuinely excited to hear him or her speak—you may even be nervous and hoping you don't act like a complete fool when you get your forty seconds of conversation with them as they sign your book. But you know them as what they are: An author, a person, an ordinary human who happens to write the words you love to read.

But when you were twelve—or perhaps more accurately, when *I* was twelve—things were different. To begin, authors were not just common schmoes who happened to string words together. They were, in a word, mystics. When I was twelve I had been a reader for a decade and a writer for about a year, and in both cases at a stage where I was old enough to finally understand that writing didn't just *happen*; it was an expression of both will and imagination.

What I didn't know—and honestly at age twelve couldn't have known—was how to put the two together. I would walk through the stacks of my local library, where I spent a genuinely huge amount of my time, running my hands along the spines of the books, wondering that each book represented a single person. How did they make it happen? I could barely manage four pages in a lined composition book before I began to sweat. Here were whole books of dense, close-set, unlined words, spanning hundreds of pages.

I simply couldn't grasp how it could be done, and I think now that I believed something at age twelve that I would describe as a literary consonant to Clarke's Law: That any sustained effort of fiction writing was indistinguishable from magic. Magic was the only way people could possibly write as long, and as well, as they had to in order to make a book at the end.

Therefore: Authors were wizards.

And Ray Bradbury, to my mind at least, had to be the top wizard of all. Because of all the wizards practicing their craft—or of the ones I was reading at the time, which is possibly an important qualification—he was clearly the one most in control of his magic, the one who again even at the age of twelve I could see was doing something with his words that no one else I was reading was doing.

I should pause here to note that my introduction to Ray Bradbury had come the year before, in Mr. Johnson's sixth grade class at Ben Lomond Elementary, when I was assigned by my teacher to read *The Martian Chronicles*. Now, understand that being assigned a book is no positive thing. It's a well-known fact that if you wish to inspire in a child a vast hatred of any single book, all you have to do is assign it to him in school. This generally works like a charm, and is why, for example, I to this day loathe George Eliot's *The Mill on the Floss* with the sort of passion normally reserved for ex-spouses or whatever presidential candidate it is you're damn well not voting for.

Fortunately for me and for the book, there were two significant mitigating factors. The first was that I had already been inducted into the cult of the science fiction geek; the door had opened in the fourth grade, with a copy of Robert Heinlein's *Farmer in the Sky*. I had wasted little time getting myself over the threshold, burning through the school library's rather meager collection of science fiction—mostly Heinlein juvies and a few poor imitations of Heinlein juvies, their titles and authors now lost due to pre-adolescent critical expunging from memory. I was primed, basically, to receive the book.

The second factor was that the book came, not from an approved curriculum list, but from Mr. Johnson himself. Every student has the teacher who looms in memory, and Keith Johnson is mine—a fine, handsome and fearfully smart man who didn't take any crap (which is an excellent trait in handling sixth graders) but who also saw each of his students for themselves (which is an *exceptional* trait in handling sixth graders). Mr. Johnson gave me *The Martian Chronicles* to read and said this to me as he handed it over: "You *should* be reading this." He also said it was one of his favorite books.

To get the book, vouched for in that way, felt like an intimacy between the two of us. I realize using the word "intimacy" there opens things up to an unseemly interpretation, which would be, mind you, ridiculous. What it means is that while in no way stepping out of the teacher-student relationship, Mr. Johnson was treating me as a confidant, and even in a small way as an equal: *This book means something to me*, he was saying. *It might mean something to you, too.* It was, in other words, a powerful recommendation.

And Mr. Johnson was right. It meant something to me. *The Martian Chronicles* is not a child's book, but it is an excellent book to give to a child—or to give to the right child, which I flatter myself that I was—because it is a book that is full of *awakening*. Which means, simply, that when you read it, you can feel parts of your brain clicking on, becoming sensitized to the fact that *something is happening here*, in this book, with these words, even if you can't actually communicate to anyone outside of your own head just what that something is. I certainly couldn't have, in the sixth grade—I simply didn't have the words. As I recall, I didn't much try: I just sat there staring down at the final line of the book, with the Martians staring back at me, simply trying to process what I had just read.

I could tell you now about all of it—I'm a good enough wizard on my own now—but that would take more space than you would have tolerance for in an introduction. I know you are eager to get through this and start re-reading the book you love.

But I will give you one example: *The Martian Chronicles* was the first book to make me understand that words themselves, and in themselves, had power. The genre of science fiction vaunts itself as the literature of ideas, which seems a bit much. It's more to the point that it's the literature of *engineering*, originally springing forth from the minds of proto-geeks fascinated with the technical potential of the future. These men (and occasional women) used words as fine-tooled machines to work those ideas into print, practically rather than poetically.

There's nothing wrong with this. I largely stand in this tradition myself. What it does mean, however, is that much of science fiction prose reads flat. Great colorful playful ideas, packaged in a big cardboard box.

Ray Bradbury's words are not a cardboard container for his ideas. His words have weight and rhythm and pace and form; they are a scaffold of filigree for his ideas to weave themselves in and around, taking form through them. Bradbury's people did not exist for the sake of exposition or simply to have things happen to them: He sketched them in what they said (or didn't say), and how they said them or not. Words gave rise to character, economically but fully revealing a spaceman disgusted with his people, two strangers from different times meeting on a road, a man who learns he's okay being alone, a father teaching his children about who the Martians truly are.

The Martian Chronicles was the first science fiction book to make me feel a character's righteous rage (not to mention the concept of ironically literal death, both in the same chapter) and the first science fiction book to make me feel loss and loneliness in my gut, doing it without featuring a single human, save as a shadow on a wall. And more than the first science fiction that did all these things: The first fiction, too.

The Martian Chronicles, in short, showed me what words can truly do. It showed me magic.

And now you might understand how, at age twelve, I was amazed beyond words that this wizard was coming to town, and would be somewhere I could meet him and see him, in the flesh, for myself. Because I was geek enough to be well-known to all the librarians, who were hosting this wizard's appearance, I managed to wheedle my way into being in the group that would welcome him to the library and would get him ready to meet his public in our library's common room, which we grandly but not wholly inaccurately labeled a "forum." I would meet this wizard of all wizards, I would spend time with him, and perhaps I might even get him to show me some of his secrets. It was an excellent plan.

Which didn't work. Ray Bradbury's magic is strong, but the black magic of the 210 Freeway at rush hour is stronger—Bradbury arrived only minutes before he was set to speak. Nevertheless, the librarians, knowing how excited I was to meet him, pushed me forward and introduced me to him, and gave me a prime opportunity to talk magic with the wizard.

At which point my tongue, previously full of questions, fell out of my head, and all I could do was squeak about how much I liked his books. As I recall, the wizard tousled my hair, said something I don't remember except that it was kind, signed the copy of *The Martian Chronicles* I had in my hand, and then went up to our forum to do another kind of magic, which was to entertain a room full of admirers for an hour.

I would say that I never got another chance to have the wizard show me his magic, but that's not quite true. I never have met Ray Bradbury again in person. His magic, however, is there in his work. When you read it, if you pay attention, the wizard shows you all his magic and power. If you're smart, you see how it works. If you have some talent, you might be able to pull off a trick or two. Will you become a wizard? Well, that depends on many things, some of which will not be under your control. But you won't be able to say that this particular wizard has not been generous with his magic.

What I have never gotten another chance to do, however, is to thank the wizard, for what he's showed me and taught me and how he's inspired me to use my own magic. This seems as good a time and place as any. So thank you, Mr. Bradbury, for all of it.

And now, like the rest of you, I'm off to read *The Martian Chronicles* another time. I suspect this wizard has more magic to show me here. I want to see it.

John Scalzi
June 18, 2009

The Long Road to Mars:

INTRODUCTION TO THE 40TH ANNIVERSARY EDITION

How did I get from Waukegan, Illinois, to the Red Planet, Mars?

Perhaps two men could tell you.

Their names appear on the dedication page of this Fortieth Anniversary Edition of *The Martian Chronicles.*

For it was my friend Norman Corwin who first listened to me tell my Martian stories, and my future editor Walter I. Bradbury (no relation) who saw what I was up to, even though I was unaware of what I was doing, and persuaded me to finish a novel I didn't know I had written.

How I traveled to that spring night in 1949 when Walter Bradbury surprised me with myself is an unguided pathway of What Ifs.

What if I had never heard and fallen in love with Norman Corwin's radio dramas when I was nineteen?

What if I had never sent my first book of stories to Corwin, who then became a lifetime friend?

And what if I hadn't taken his advice to go to New York City in June 1949?

Then, very simply, *The Martian Chronicles* might never have existed.

But Norman argued again and again that I should be underfoot in the publishing houses of Manhattan and that he and his wife Katie would be there to lead and protect me in and around the Big Town. Because of his persuasion, I traveled across country, four long days and nights on a Greyhound Bus, fermenting into a large ball of fungus, with a pregnant wife left behind in Los Angeles with $40 in the bank and the YMCA ($5 a week) waiting for me on Forty-second Street.

The Corwins, good to their promise, toured and introduced me to a clutch of editors who asked: "Did you bring a novel?"

I confessed that I was a sprinter and had brought only fifty short stories and an ancient, battered portable typewriter. Were they in need of fifty superimaginative tales, mostly brilliant? They were not.

Which brings me to my final, most important What If.

What if I had never dined with the last editor I met, Walter I. Bradbury from Doubleday, who asked the old depressing question—"Is there a novel in you somewhere?"—only to hear me describe the four-minute mile I paced each day, stepping on a land mine idea at breakfast, picking up the pieces, and fusing them to cool by lunch.

Walter Bradbury shook his head, finished his dessert, mused, and then said:

"I think you've already written a novel."

"What?" I said, "And *when*?"

"What about all those Martian stories you've published in the past four years?" Brad replied. "Isn't there a common thread buried there? Couldn't you sew them together, make some sort of tapestry, half-cousin to a novel?"

"My god!" I said.

"Yes?"

"My god," I said. "Back in 1944, I was so impressed by Sherwood Anderson's *Winesburg, Ohio*, that I told myself I must try to write something half as good, and set it on Mars. I sketched out an outline of characters and events on the Red Planet, but soon lost it in my files!"

"Looks as if we've found it," said Brad.

"*Have* we?"

"We have," said Brad. "Go back to the YMCA and type me an outline of those two or three dozen Martian stories. Bring it in tomorrow. If I like what I see, I'll give you a contract and an advance."

Don Congdon, my best friend and literary agent, seated across the table, nodded.

"I'll be at your office by noon!" I said to Brad.

To celebrate I ordered a second dessert. Brad and Don each had a beer.

It was a typical hot June night in New York. Air conditioning was still a luxury of some future year. I typed until 3 A.M., perspiring in my underwear as I weighed and balanced my Martians in their strange cities in the last hours before the arrivals and departures of my astronauts.

At noon, exhausted but elated, I delivered the outline to Walter I. Bradbury.

"You've done it!" he said. "You'll get a contract and a check tomorrow."

I must have made a lot of noise. When I calmed down, I asked him about my other stories.

"Now that we're publishing your first 'novel,'" Brad said, "we can take a chance on your stories, even though such collections rarely sell. Can you think of a title that would sort of put a skin around two dozen different tales—?"

"Skin?" I said. "Why not *The Illustrated Man*, my story about a carnival barker whose tattoos sweat themselves alive, one by one, and act out their futures on his chest and legs and arms?"

"Looks as if I'll have to make out two advance checks," said Walter I. Bradbury.

I left New York three days later with two contracts and two checks totaling $1,500. Enough money to pay our $30-a-month rent for a year, finance our baby, and help with the down payment on a small tract house inland from Venice, California. By the time our first daughter was born in the autumn of 1949, I had fitted and fused all of my lost but now found Martian objects. It turned out to be not a book of eccentric characters as in *Winesburg, Ohio*, but a series of strange ideas, notions, fancies, and dreams that I had begun to sleep on and waken to when I was twelve.

The Martian Chronicles was published the next year, in the late spring of 1950.

Traveling east that spring, I did not know what I had done.

Between trains in Chicago, I walked to the Art Institute to have lunch with a friend. I saw a crowd at the top of the institute stairs and thought they were tourists.

But as I started walking up, the crowd came down and surrounded me. They were not art lovers, but readers who had got ten early copies of *The Martian Chronicles* and had come to tell me just exactly what I had all-too-unknowingly done. That noon encounter changed my life forever. Nothing was the same after that.

The list of What Ifs could go on forever. What if I hadn't met Maggie, who took a vow of poverty to marry me? What if Don Congdon had never written to become and remain my agent for forty-three years, starting in the same week that I married Marguerite?

And what if, soon after the publication of the *Chronicles*, I had missed being in a small Santa Monica bookshop when Christopher Isherwood stopped by.

Quickly, I signed and handed over a copy of my novel.

With an expression of regret and alarm, Isherwood accepted and fled.

Three days later, he telephoned.

"Do you know what you've done?" he said.

"What?" I said.

"You've written a fine book," he said. "I've just become the lead book reviewer for *Tomorrow* magazine and yours will be the first book that I review."

A few months later, Isherwood called to say that the celebrated English philosopher Gerald Heard wished to come meet me.

"He can't!" I cried.

"Why not?"

"Because," I protested, "we have no furniture in our new house!"

"Gerald Heard will sit on your floor," said Isherwood.

Heard arrived and perched on our one and only chair.

Isherwood, Maggie, and I sat on the floor.

Some weeks later, Heard and Aldous Huxley invited me to tea, where both leaned forward, one echoing the other, and asked:

"Do you know what you are?"

"What?"

"A *poet*," they said.

"My god," I said. "*Am* I?"

So we end as we began, with one friend seeing me off and another taking me in from a journey. What if Norman Corwin had not sent me or if Walter I. Bradbury had not received me? Mars might never have gained an atmosphere, and its people would never have been born to live in golden masks, and its cities, unbuilt, would have stayed lost in the unquarried hills. Much thanks to them then for that journey to Manhattan, which turned out to be a forty-year round trip to another world.

Ray Bradbury
Paris
July 6, 1990

GREEN TOWN, SOMEWHERE ON MARS; MARS, SOMEWHERE IN EGYPT

AN INTRODUCTION BY RAY BRADBURY

"Don't tell me what I'm doing; I don't want to know!"

Those are not my words. They were spoken by my friend, the Italian film director, Federico Fellini. As he shot his screenplays scene by scene, he refused seeing the new footage trapped in the camera and printed in the laboratory at the end of each day. He wanted his scenes to remain mysterious *provocateurs* to lure him on.

So it has been with my stories, plays, and poems over most of my lifetime. So it was with *The Martian Chronicles* in the years just before my marriage in 1947, culminating in the rapid surprises of the final work in the summer of 1949. What began as an occasional story or "aside" concerning the Red Planet became a pomegranate explosion in July and August of that year when I jumped to my typewriter each morning to find what rare new thing my Muse was willing to deliver.

Did I have such a Muse? And did I always believe in that mythical beast? No. Early on, in and out of high school, and standing on a street corner selling newspapers, I did what most writers do at their beginnings: emulated my elders, imitated my peers, thus turning away from any possibility of discovering truths beneath my skin and behind my eyes.

Even though I wrote a series of very good weird/fantasy stories which were published in my midtwenties, I learned nothing from them. I refused to see that I was disturbing a lot of good stuff in my head and trapping it on paper. My peculiar stories were vivid and real. My future tales were lifeless robots, mechanical and motionless.

It was Sherwood Anderson's *Winesburg, Ohio,* that set me free. Sometime in my twentieth-fourth year, I was stunned by its dozen characters living their lives on half-lit porches and in sunless attics of that always autumn town. "Oh, Lord," I cried. "If I could write a book half as fine as this, but set it on Mars, how incredible that would be!"

I scribbled down a list of possible sites and folks on that distant world, imagined titles, started and stopped a dozen tales, then filed it away and forgot it. Or *imagined* that I had forgotten it.

Because the Muse persists. It goes on living, though neglected, waiting for you to give it air or die without giving it utterance. My job was to convince myself that the myth was more than ghost, an intuitive substance to be aroused to speak in tongues and move out the ends of my fingers.

During the next few years I wrote a series of Martian *pensées,* Shakespearian "asides," wandering thoughts, long night visions, predawn half-dreams. The French, like St. John Perse, practice this to perfection. It is the half-poem, half-prose paragraph that runs as little as one hundred words or as long as a full page on any subject, summoned by weather, time, architectural facade, fine wine, good victuals, a view of the sea, quick sunsets, or a long sunrise. From these elements one upchucks rare hairballs or a maundering Hamlet-like soliloquy.

In any event, I laid out my *pensées* in no special order or plan and entombed them with two dozen other tales.

Then a happy thing occurred. Norman Corwin, radio's greatest writer/director, insisted that I visit New York to be "discovered." Obedient to his insistence I bussed to Manhattan, languished in the YMCA, and met Walter Bradbury, no relation, the fine Doubleday editor who suggested that I might have woven an unseen tapestry. All those Martian tales, he suggested, can't you needle-and-thread them, stitch them up into *The Martian Chronicles*?

"Ohmigod," I whispered. *"Winesburg, Ohio!"*

"What?" said Walter Bradbury.

The next day I delivered *The Chronicles* outline to Walter Bradbury, plus a concept for *The Illustrated Man.* I trained home with a fifteen-hundred-dollar check in my wallet, which paid the rent (thirty dollars a month) for two years and delivered our first baby daughter.

The Martian Chronicles was published in the late spring of 1950 to a few reviews. Only Christopher Isherwood placed a laurel wreath on my head as he introduced me to Aldous Huxley, who, at tea, leaned forward and said, "Do you know what you *are*?"

Don't tell me what I'm doing, I thought. *I don't want to know.*

"You," said Huxley, "are a poet."

"I'll be damned," I said.

"No, blessed," said Huxley.

Truly, genetically blessed.

And the blessing lies in this book.

Will you find blood traces of Sherwood Anderson here? No. His stunning influence had long since dissolved into my ganglion. You might see a few apparitions of *Winesburg, Ohio* in my other book-of-stories-pretending-to-be-a-novel, *Dandelion Wine.* But there are no mirror images. Anderson's grotesques were gargoyles off the town roofs; mine are mostly collie dogs, old maids lost in soda fountains, and a boy supersensitive to dead trolley cars, lost chums, and Civil War Colonels drowned in time or drunk on remembrance. The only gargoyles on Mars are Martians disguised as my Green Town relatives, hiding out until comeuppance.

Sherwood Anderson would not have known the proper handling of Independence night fire balloons. I lit and flew them on Mars and in Green Town, resident and quietly burning in both books. They burn there still, with just enough light to help in the reading.

Some eighteen years ago I produced *The Martian Chronicles* onstage in a Wilshire Boulevard theater. Six blocks to the west in the Los Angeles Art Museum the Egyptian

Tutankhamen traveling exhibit lay revealed. Moving back and forth from Tut to theater, theater to Tut, my jaw dropped.

"My God," I said, gazing at Tutankhamen's golden mask, "that's Mars."

"My God," I said, watching my Martians onstage, "that's Egypt with Tutankhamen's ghosts."

So, before my eyes and mixed in my mind, old myths were renewed, new myths were bandaged in papyrus and lidded with bright masks.

Without knowing, I had been Tut's child all the while, writing the Red World's hieroglyphics, thinking I thrived futures even in dust-rinsed pasts.

All that being true, how come *The Martian Chronicles* is often described as Science Fiction? It misfits that description. There is only one story in the entire book that obeys the laws of technological physics: "There Will Come Soft Rains." It was among the first Virtual Reality houses that positioned themselves in our midst these last few years. In 1950 that house would have cost a bankrupt sum. With the advent of today's computers, Internets, faxes, audio tapes, Walkmen earplugs, and wide-screen TV, its rooms could be hot-wired on the cheap at Circuit City.

All right, then, what *is Chronicles?* It is King Tut out of the tomb when I was three, Norse Eddas when I was six, and Roman/Greek gods that romanced me when I was ten: pure myth. If it had been practical technologically efficient science fiction, it would have long since fallen to rust by the road. But since it is a self-separating fable, even the most deeply rooted physicists at Cal-Tech accept breathing the fraudulent oxygen atmosphere I have loosed on Mars. Science and machines can kill each other off or be replaced. Myth, seen in mirrors, incapable of being touched, stays on. If it is not immortal, it almost seems such.

Finally:

Don't tell me what I am doing; I don't want to know!

What a way to live. The only way. For by pretending at ignorance, the intuition, curious at seeming neglect, rears its invisible head and snakes out through your palm-prints in mythological forms. And because I wrote myths, perhaps my Mars has a few more years of impossible life. One thing half-assures me: I am still being invited back to the California Institute of Technology.

JANUARY 2030:

ROCKET SUMMER

One minute it was Ohio winter, with doors closed, windows locked, the panes blind with frost, icicles fringing every roof, children skiing on slopes, housewives lumbering like great black bears in their furs along the icy streets.

And then a long wave of warmth crossed the small town. A flooding sea of hot air; it seemed as if someone had left a bakery door open. The heat pulsed among the cottages and bushes and children. The icicles dropped, shattering, to melt. The doors flew open. The windows flew up. The children worked off their wool clothes. The housewives shed their bear disguises. The snow dissolved and showed last summer's ancient green lawns.

Rocket summer. The words passed among the people in the open, airing houses. *Rocket summer.* The warm desert air changing the frost patterns on the windows, erasing the art work. The skis and sleds suddenly useless. The snow, falling from the cold sky upon the town, turned to a hot rain before it touched the ground.

Rocket summer. People leaned from their dripping porches and watched the reddening sky.

The rocket lay on the launching field, blowing out pink clouds of fire and oven heat. The rocket stood in the cold winter morning, making summer with every breath of its mighty exhausts. The rocket made climates, and summer lay for a brief moment upon the land....

FEBRUARY 2030:

YLLA

They had a house of crystal pillars on the planet Mars by the edge of an empty sea, and every morning you could see Mrs. K eating the golden fruits that grew from the crystal walls, or cleaning the house with handfuls of magnetic dust which, taking all dirt with it, blew away on the hot wind. Afternoons, when the fossil sea was warm and motionless, and the wine trees stood stiff in the yard, and the little distant Martian bone town was all enclosed, and no one drifted out their doors, you could see Mr. K himself in his room, reading from a metal book with raised hieroglyphs over which he brushed his hand, as one might play a harp. And from the book, as his fingers stroked, a voice sang, a soft ancient voice, which told tales of when the sea was red steam on the shore and ancient men had carried clouds of metal insects and electric spiders into battle.

Mr. and Mrs. K had lived by the dead sea for twenty years, and their ancestors had lived in the same house, which turned and followed the sun, flower-like, for ten centuries.

Mr. and Mrs. K were not old. They had the fair, brownish skin of the true Martian, the yellow coin eyes, the soft musical voices. Once they had liked painting pictures with chemical fire, swimming in the canals in the seasons when the wine trees filled them with green liquors, and talking into the dawn together by the blue phosphorous portraits in the speaking room.

They were not happy now.

This morning Mrs. K stood between the pillars, listening to the desert sands heat, melt into yellow wax, and seemingly run on the horizon.

Something was going to happen.

She waited.

She watched the blue sky of Mars as if it might at any moment grip in on itself, contract, and expel a shining miracle down upon the sand.

Nothing happened.

Tired of waiting, she walked through the misting pillars. A gentle rain sprang from the fluted pillar tops, cooling the scorched air, falling gently on her. On hot days it was like walking in a creek. The floors of the house glittered with cool streams. In the distance she heard her husband playing his book steadily, his fingers never tired of the old songs. Quietly she wished he might one day again spend as much time holding and touching her like a little harp as he did his incredible books.

But no. She shook her head, an imperceptible, forgiving shrug. Her eyelids closed softly down upon her golden eyes. Marriage made people old and familiar, while still young.

She lay back in a chair that moved to take her shape even as she moved. She closed her eyes tightly and nervously.

The dream occurred.

Her brown fingers trembled, came up, grasped at the air. A moment later she sat up, startled, gasping.

She glanced about swiftly, as if expecting someone there before her. She seemed disappointed; the space between the pillars was empty.

Her husband appeared in a triangular door. "Did you call?" he asked irritably.

"No!" she cried.

"I thought I heard you cry out."

"Did I? I was almost asleep and had a dream!"

"In the daytime? You don't often do that."

She sat as if struck in the face by the dream. "How strange, how very strange," she murmured. "The dream."

"Oh?" He evidently wished to return to his book.

"I dreamed about a man."

"A man?"

"A tall man, six feet one inch tall."

"How absurd; a giant, a misshapen giant."

"Somehow"—she tried the words—"he looked all right. In spite of being tall. And he had—oh, I know you'll think it silly—he had *blue* eyes!"

"Blue eyes! Gods!" cried Mr. K. "What'll you dream next? I suppose he had *black* hair?"

"How did you *guess*?" She was excited.

"I picked the most unlikely color," he replied coldly.

"Well, black it was!" she cried. "And he had a very white skin; oh, he was *most* unusual! He was dressed in a strange uniform and he came down out of the sky and spoke pleasantly to me." She smiled.

"Out of the sky; what nonsense!"

"He came in a metal thing that glittered in the sun," she remembered. She closed her eyes to shape it again. "I dreamed there was the sky and something sparkled like a coin thrown into the air, and suddenly it grew large and fell down softly to land, a long silver craft, round and alien. And a door opened in the side of the silver object and this tall man stepped out."

"If you worked harder you wouldn't have these silly dreams."

"I rather enjoyed it," she replied, lying back. "I never suspected myself of such an imagination. Black hair, blue eyes, and white skin! What a strange man, and yet—quite handsome."

"Wishful thinking."

"You're unkind. I didn't think him up on purpose; he just came in my mind while I drowsed. It wasn't like a dream. It was so unexpected and different. He looked at

me and he said, 'I've come from the third planet in my ship. My name is Nathaniel York—'"

"A stupid name; it's no name at all," objected the husband.

"Of course it's stupid, because it's a dream," she explained softly. "And he said, 'This is the first trip across space. There are only two of us in our ship, myself and my friend Bert.'"

"*Another* stupid name."

"And he said, 'We're from a city on *Earth*; that's the name of our planet,'" continued Mrs. K. "That's what he said. 'Earth' was the name he spoke. And he used another language. Somehow I understood him. With my mind. Telepathy, I suppose."

Mr. K turned away. She stopped him with a word. "Yll?" she called quietly. "Do you ever wonder if—well, if there *are* people living on the third planet?"

"The third planet is incapable of supporting life," stated the husband patiently. "Our scientists have said there's far too much oxygen in their atmosphere."

"But wouldn't it be fascinating if there *were* people? And they traveled through space in some sort of ship?"

"Really, Ylla, you know how I hate this emotional wailing. Let's get on with our work."

It was late in the day when she began singing the song as she moved among the whispering pillars of rain. She sang it over and over again.

"What's that song?" snapped her husband at last, walking in to sit at the fire table.

"I don't know." She looked up, surprised at herself. She put her hand to her mouth, unbelieving. The sun was setting. The house was closing itself in, like a giant flower, with the passing of light. A wind blew among the pillars; the fire table bubbled its fierce pool of silver lava. The wind stirred her russet hair, crooning softly in her ears. She stood silently looking out into the great sallow distances of sea bottom, as if recalling something, her yellow eyes soft and moist. "'Drink to me only with thine eyes, and I will pledge with mine,'" she sang, softly, quietly, slowly. "'Or leave a kiss within the cup, and I'll not ask for wine.'" She hummed now, moving her hands in the wind ever so lightly, her eyes shut. She finished the song.

It was very beautiful.

"Never heard that song before. Did you compose it?" he inquired, his eyes sharp.

"No. Yes. No, I don't know, really!" She hesitated wildly. "I don't even know what the words are; they're another language!"

"What language?"

She dropped portions of meat numbly into the simmering lava. "I don't know." She drew the meat forth a moment later, cooked, served on a plate for him. "It's just a crazy thing I made up, I guess. I don't know why."

He said nothing. He watched her drown meats in the hissing fire pool. The sun was gone. Slowly, slowly the night came in to fill the room, swallowing the pillars and both of them, like a dark wine poured to the ceiling. Only the silver lava's glow lit their faces.

She hummed the strange song again.

Instantly he leaped from his chair and stalked angrily from the room.

Later, in isolation, he finished supper.

When he arose he stretched, glanced at her, and suggested, yawning, "Let's take the flame birds to town tonight to see an entertainment."

"You don't *mean* it?" she said. "Are you feeling well?"

"What's so strange about that?"

"But we haven't gone for an entertainment in six months!"

"I think it's a good idea."

"Suddenly you're so solicitous," she said.

"Don't talk that way," he replied peevishly. "Do you or do you not want to go?"

She looked out at the pale desert. The twin white moons were rising. Cool water ran softly about her toes. She began to tremble just the least bit. She wanted very much to sit quietly here, soundless, not moving until this thing occurred, this thing expected all day, this thing that could not occur but might. A drift of song brushed through her mind.

"I—"

"Do you good," he urged. "Come along now."

"I'm tired," she said. "Some other night."

"Here's your scarf." He handed her a phial. "We haven't gone anywhere in months."

"Except you, twice a week to Xi City." She wouldn't look at him.

"Business," he said.

"Oh?" She whispered to herself.

From the phial a liquid poured, turned to blue mist, settled about her neck, quivering.

The flame birds waited, like a bed of coals, glowing on the cool smooth sands. The white canopy ballooned on the night wind, flapping softly, tied by a thousand green ribbons to the birds.

Ylla laid herself back in the canopy and, at a word from her husband, the birds leaped, burning, toward the dark sky. The ribbons tautened, the canopy lifted. The sand slid whining under; the blue hills drifted by, drifted by, leaving their home behind, the raining pillars, the caged flowers, the singing books, the whispering floor creeks. She did not look at her husband. She heard him crying out to the birds as they rose higher, like ten thousand hot sparkles, so many red-yellow fireworks in the heavens, tugging the canopy like a flower petal, burning through the wind.

She didn't watch the dead, ancient bone-chess cities slide under, or the old canals filled with emptiness and dreams. Past dry rivers and dry lakes they flew, like a shadow of the moon, like a torch burning.

She watched only the sky.

The husband spoke.

She watched the sky.

"Did you hear what I said?"

"What?"

He exhaled. "You might pay attention."

"I was thinking."

"I never thought you were a nature lover, but you're certainly interested in the sky tonight," he said.

"It's very beautiful."

"I was figuring," said the husband slowly. "I thought I'd call Hulle tonight. I'd like to talk to him about us spending some time, oh, only a week or so, in the Blue Mountains. It's just an idea—"

"The Blue Mountains!" She held to the canopy rim with one hand, turning swiftly toward him.

"Oh, it's just a suggestion."

"When do you want to go?" she asked, trembling.

"I thought we might leave tomorrow morning. You know, an early start and all that," he said very casually.

"But we *never* go this early in the year!"

"Just this once, I thought—" He smiled. "Do us good to get away. Some peace and quiet. You know. You haven't anything *else* planned? We'll go, won't we?"

She took a breath, waited, and then replied, "No."

"What?" His cry startled the birds. The canopy jerked.

"No," she said firmly. "It's settled. I won't go."

He looked at her. They did not speak after that. She turned away.

The birds flew on, ten thousand firebrands down the wind.

In the dawn the sun, through the crystal pillars, melted the fog that supported Ylla as she slept. All night she had hung above the floor, buoyed by the soft carpeting of mist that poured from the walls when she lay down to rest. All night she had slept on this silent river, like a boat upon a soundless tide. Now the fog burned away, the mist level lowered until she was deposited upon the shore of wakening.

She opened her eyes.

Her husband stood over her. He looked as if he had stood there for hours, watching. She did not know why, but she could not look him in the face.

"You've been dreaming again!" he said. "You spoke out and kept me awake. I *really* think you should see a doctor."

"I'll be all right."

"You talked a lot in your sleep!"

"Did I?" She started up.

Dawn was cold in the room. A gray light filled her as she lay there.

"What was your dream?"

She had to think a moment to remember. "The ship. It came from the sky again, landed, and the tall man stepped out and talked with me, telling me little jokes, laughing, and it was pleasant."

Mr. K touched a pillar. Founts of warm water leaped up, steaming; the chill vanished from the room. Mr. K's face was impassive.

"And then," she said, "this man, who said his strange name was Nathaniel York, told me I was beautiful and—and kissed me."

"Ha!" cried the husband, turning violently away, his jaw working.

"It's only a dream." She was amused.

"Keep your silly, feminine dreams to yourself!"

"You're acting like a child." She lapsed back upon the few remaining remnants of chemical mist. After a moment she laughed softly. "I thought of some *more* of the dream," she confessed.

"Well, what is it, what *is* it?" he shouted.

"Yll, you're so bad-tempered."

"Tell me!" he demanded. "You can't keep secrets from me!" His face was dark and rigid as he stood over her.

"I've never seen you this way," she replied, half shocked, half entertained. "All that happened was this Nathaniel York person told me—well, he told me that he'd take me away into his ship, into the sky with him, and take me back to his planet with him. It's really quite ridiculous."

"Ridiculous, is it!" he almost screamed. "You should have heard yourself, fawning on him, talking to him, singing with him, oh gods, all night; you should have *heard* yourself!"

"Yll!"

"When's he landing? Where's he coming down with his damned ship?"

"Yll, lower your voice."

"Voice be damned!" He bent stiffly over her. "And *in* this dream"—he seized her wrist—"didn't the ship land over in Green Valley, *didn't* it? Answer me!"

"Why, yes—"

"And it landed this afternoon, didn't it?" he kept at her.

"Yes, yes, I think so, yes, but only in a dream!"

"Well"—he flung her hand away stiffly—"it's good you're truthful! I heard every word you said in your sleep. You mentioned the valley and the time." Breathing hard, he walked between the pillars like a man blinded by a lightning bolt. Slowly his breath returned. She watched him as if he were quite insane. She arose finally and went to him. "Yll," she whispered.

"I'm all right."

"You're sick."

"No." He forced a tired smile. "Just childish. Forgive me, darling." He gave her a rough pat. "Too much work lately. I'm sorry. I think I'll lie down awhile—"

"You were so excited."

"I'm all right now. Fine." He exhaled. "Let's forget it. Say, I heard a joke about Uel yesterday, I meant to tell you. What do you say you fix breakfast, I'll tell the joke, and let's not talk about all this."

"It was only a dream."

"Of course." He kissed her cheek mechanically. "Only a dream."

At noon the sun was high and hot and the hills shimmered in the light.

"Aren't you going to town?" asked Ylla.

"Town?" He raised his brows faintly.

"This is the day you *always* go." She adjusted a flower cage on its pedestal. The flowers stirred, opening their hungry yellow mouths.

He closed his book. "No. It's too hot, and it's late."

"Oh." She finished her task and moved toward the door. "Well, I'll be back soon."

"Wait a minute! Where are you going?"

She was in the door swiftly. "Over to Pao's. She invited me!"

"Today?"

"I haven't seen her in a long time. It's only a little way."

"Over in Green Valley, isn't it?"

"Yes, just a walk, not far, I thought I'd—" She hurried.

"I'm sorry, really sorry," he said, running to fetch her back, looking very concerned about his forgetfulness. "It slipped my mind. I invited Dr. Nlle out this afternoon."

"Dr. Nlle!" She edged toward the door.

He caught her elbow and drew her steadily in. "Yes."

"But Pao—"

"Pao can wait, Ylla. We must entertain Nlle."

"Just for a few minutes—"

"No, Ylla."

"No?"

He shook his head. "No. Besides, it's a terribly long walk to Pao's. All the way over through Green Valley and then past the big canal and down, isn't it? And it'll be very, very hot, and Dr. Nlle would be delighted to see you. Well?"

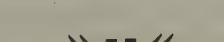
She did not answer. She wanted to break and run. She wanted to cry out. But she only sat in the chair, turning her fingers over slowly, staring at them expressionlessly, trapped.

"Ylla?" he murmured. "You *will* be here, won't you?"

"Yes," she said after a long time. "I'll be here."

"All afternoon?"

Her voice was dull. "All afternoon."



Late in the day Dr. Nlle had not put in an appearance. Ylla's husband did not seem overly surprised. When it was quite late he murmured something, went to a closet, and

drew forth an evil weapon, a long yellowish tube ending in a bellows and a trigger. He turned, and upon his face was a mask, hammered from silver metal, expressionless, the mask that he always wore when he wished to hide his feelings, the mask which curved and hollowed so exquisitely to his thin cheeks and chin and brow. The mask glinted, and he held the evil weapon in his hands, considering it. It hummed constantly, an insect hum. From it hordes of golden bees could be flung out with a high shriek. Golden, horrid bees that stung, poisoned, and fell lifeless, like seeds on the sand.

"Where are you going?" she asked.

"What?" He listened to the bellows, to the evil hum. "If Dr. Nlle is late, I'll be damned if I'll wait. I'm going out to hunt a bit. I'll be back. You be sure to stay right here now, won't you?" The silver mask glimmered.

"Yes."

"And tell Dr. Nlle I'll return. Just hunting."

The triangular door closed. His footsteps faded down the hill.

She watched him walking through the sunlight until he was gone. Then she resumed her tasks with the magnetic dusts and the new fruits to be plucked from the crystal walls. She worked with energy and dispatch, but on occasion a numbness took hold of her and she caught herself singing that odd and memorable song and looking out beyond the crystal pillars at the sky.

She held her breath and stood very still, waiting.

It was coming nearer.

At any moment it might happen.

It was like those days when you heard a thunderstorm coming and there was the waiting silence and then the faintest pressure of the atmosphere as the climate blew over the land in shifts and shadows and vapors. And the change pressed at your ears and you were suspended in the waiting time of the coming storm. You began to tremble. The sky was stained and colored; the clouds were thickened; the mountains took on an iron taint. The caged flowers blew with faint sighs of warning. You felt your hair stir softly. Somewhere in the house the voice-clock sang, "Time, time, time, time..." ever so gently, no more than water tapping on velvet.

And then the storm. The electric illumination, the engulfments of dark wash and sounding black fell down, shutting in, forever.

That's how it was now. A storm gathered, yet the sky was clear. Lightning was expected, yet there was no cloud.

Ylla moved through the breathless summer house. Lightning would strike from the sky any instant; there would be a thunderclap, a boll of smoke, a silence, footsteps on the path, a rap on the crystalline door, and her *running* to answer....

Crazy Ylla! she scoffed. Why think these wild things with your idle mind?

And then it happened.

There was a warmth as of a great fire passing in the air. A whirling, rushing sound. A gleam in the sky, of metal.

Ylla cried out.

Running through the pillars, she flung wide a door. She faced the hills. But by this time there was nothing.

She was about to race down the hill when she stopped herself. She was supposed to stay here, go nowhere. The doctor was coming to visit, and her husband would be angry if she ran off.

She waited in the door, breathing rapidly, her hand out.

She strained to see over toward Green Valley, but saw nothing.

Silly woman. She went inside. You and your imagination, she thought. That was nothing but a bird, a leaf, the wind, or a fish in the canal. Sit down. Rest.

She sat down.

A shot sounded.

Very clearly, sharply, the sound of the evil insect weapon.

Her body jerked with it.

It came from a long way off. One shot. The swift humming distant bees. One shot. And then a second shot, precise and cold, and far away.

Her body winced again and for some reason she started up, screaming, and screaming, and never wanting to stop screaming. She ran violently through the house and once more threw wide the door.

The echoes were dying away, away.

Gone.

She waited in the yard, her face pale, for five minutes.

Finally, with slow steps, her head down, she wandered about the pillared rooms, laying her hand to things, her lips quivering, until finally she sat alone in the darkening wine room, waiting. She began to wipe an amber glass with the hem of her scarf.

And then, from far off, the sound of footsteps crunching on the thin, small rocks.

She rose up to stand in the center of the quiet room. The glass fell from her fingers, smashing to bits.

The footsteps hesitated outside the door.

Should she speak? Should she cry out, "Come in, oh, come in"?

She went forward a few paces.

The footsteps walked up the ramp. A hand twisted the door latch.

She smiled at the door.

The door opened. She stopped smiling.

It was her husband. His silver mask glowed dully.

He entered the room and looked at her for only a moment. Then he snapped the weapon bellows open, cracked out two dead bees, heard them spat on the floor as they fell, stepped on them, and placed the empty bellows gun in the corner of the room as Ylla bent down and tried, over and over, with no success, to pick up the pieces of the shattered glass. "What were you doing?" she asked.

"Nothing," he said with his back turned. He removed the mask.

"But the gun—I heard you fire it. Twice."

"Just hunting. Once in a while you like to hunt. Did Dr. Nlle arrive?"

"No."

"Wait a minute." He snapped his fingers disgustedly. "Why, I remember *now*. He was supposed to visit us *tomorrow* afternoon. How stupid of me."

They sat down to eat. She looked at her food and did not move her hands. "What's wrong?" he asked, not looking up from dipping his meat in the bubbling lava.

"I don't know. I'm not hungry," she said.

"Why not?"

"I don't know; I'm just not."

The wind was rising across the sky; the sun was going down. The room was small and suddenly cold.

"I've been trying to remember," she said in the silent room, across from her cold, erect, golden-eyed husband. "Remember what?" He sipped his wine.

"That song. That fine and beautiful song." She closed her eyes and hummed, but it was not the song. "I've forgotten it. And, somehow, I don't want to forget it. It's something I want always to remember." She moved her hands as if the rhythm might help her to remember all of it. Then she lay back in her chair. "I can't remember." She began to cry.

"Why are you crying?" he asked.

"I don't know, I don't know, but I can't help it. I'm sad and I don't know why, I cry and I don't know why, but I'm crying."

Her head was in her hands; her shoulders moved again and again.

"You'll be all right tomorrow," he said.

She did not look up at him; she looked only at the empty desert and the very bright stars coming out now on the black sky, and far away there was a sound of wind rising and canal waters stirring cold in the long canals. She shut her eyes, trembling.

"Yes," she said. "I'll be all right tomorrow."

AUGUST 2030:

THE SUMMER NIGHT

In the stone galleries the people were gathered in clusters and groups filtering up into shadows among the blue hills. A soft evening light shone over them from the stars and the luminous double moons of Mars. Beyond the marble amphitheater, in darkness and distances, lay little towns and villas; pools of silver water stood motionless and canals glittered from horizon to horizon. It was an evening in summer upon the placid and temperate planet Mars. Up and down green wine canals, boats as delicate as bronze flowers drifted. In the long and endless dwellings that curved like tranquil snakes across the hills, lovers lay idly whispering in cool night beds. The last children ran in torchlit alleys, gold spiders in their hands throwing out films of web. Here or there a late supper was prepared in tables where lava bubbled silvery and hushed. In the amphitheaters of a hundred towns on the night side of Mars the brown Martian people with gold coin eyes were leisurely met to fix their attention upon stages where musicians made a serene music flow up like blossom scent on the still air.

Upon one stage a woman sang.

The audience stirred.

She stopped singing. She put her hand to her throat. She nodded to the musicians and they began again.

The musicians played and she sang, and this time the audience sighed and sat forward, a few of the men stood up in surprise, and a winter chill moved through the amphitheater. For it was an odd and a frightening and a strange song this woman sang. She tried to stop the words from coming out her lips, but the words were these:

"She walks in beauty, like the night
Of cloudless climes and starry skies;
And all that's best of dark and bright
Meet in her aspect and her eyes..."

The singer clasped her hands to her mouth. She stood, bewildered.

"What words are those?" asked the musicians.

"What song is that?"

"What *language* is that!"

And when they blew again upon their golden horns the strange music came forth and passed slowly over the audience, which now talked aloud and stood up.

"What's wrong with you?" the musicians asked each other.

"What tune is that you played?"

"What tune did *you* play?"

The woman wept and ran from the stage. And the audience moved out of the amphitheater. And all around the nervous towns of Mars a similar thing had happened. A coldness had come, like white snow falling on the air.

In the black alleys, under the torches, the children sang:

"—and when she got there, the cupboard was bare,
And so her poor dog had none!"

"Children!" voices cried. "What was that rhyme? Where did you learn it?"

"We just *thought* of it, all of a sudden. It's just words we don't understand."

Doors slammed. The streets were deserted. Above the blue hills a green star rose.

All over the night side of Mars lovers awoke to listen to their loved ones who lay humming in the darkness.

"What is that tune?"

And in a thousand villas, in the middle of the night, women awoke, screaming. They had to be soothed while the tears ran down their faces. "There, there. Sleep. What's wrong? A dream?"

"Something terrible will happen in the morning."

"Nothing can happen, all is well with us."

A hysterical sobbing. "It is coming nearer and nearer and *nearer*!"

"Nothing can happen to us. What could? Sleep now. Sleep."

It was quiet in the deep morning of Mars, as quiet as a cool and black well, with stars shining in the canal waters, and, breathing in every room, the children curled with their spiders in closed hands, the lovers arm in arm, the moons gone, the torches cold, the stone amphitheaters deserted.

The only sound, just before dawn, was a night watchman, far away down a lonely street, walking along in the darkness, humming a very strange song....

THE EARTH MEN

Whoever was knocking at the door didn't want to stop.

Mrs. Ttt threw the door open. "Well?"

"You speak *English*!" The man standing there was astounded.

"I speak what I speak," she said.

"It's wonderful *English*!" The man was in uniform. There were three men with him, in a great hurry, all smiling, all dirty.

"What do you want?" demanded Mrs. Ttt.

"You are a *Martian*!" The man smiled. "The word is not familiar to you, certainly. It's an Earth expression." He nodded at his men. "We are from Earth. I'm Captain Williams. We've landed on Mars within the hour. Here we are, the *Second* Expedition! There was a First Expedition, but we don't know what happened to it. But here we are, anyway. And you are the first Martian we've met!"

"Martian?" Her eyebrows went up.

"What I mean to say is, you live on the fourth planet from the sun. Correct?"

"Elementary," she snapped, eying them.

"And we"—he pressed his chubby pink hand to his chest—"we are from Earth. Right, men?"

"Right, sir!" A chorus.

"This is the planet Tyrr," she said, "if you want to use the proper name."

"Tyrr, Tyrr." The captain laughed exhaustedly. "What a *fine* name! But, my good woman, how is it you speak such perfect English?"

"I'm not speaking, I'm thinking," she said. "Telepathy! Good day!" And she slammed the door.

A moment later there was that dreadful man knocking again. She whipped the door open. "What now?" she wondered.

The man was still there, trying to smile, looking bewildered. He put out his hands. "I don't think you *understand*—"

"What?" she snapped.

The man gazed at her in surprise. "We're from *Earth*!"

"I haven't time," she said. "I've a lot of cooking today and there's cleaning and sewing and all. You evidently wish to see Mr. Ttt; he's upstairs in his study."

"Yes," said the Earth Man confusedly, blinking. "By all means, let us see Mr. Ttt."

"He's busy." She slammed the door again.

This time the knock on the door was most impertinently loud.

"See here!" cried the man when the door was thrust open again. He jumped in as if to surprise her. "This is no way to treat visitors!"

"All over my clean floor!" she cried. "Mud! Get out! If you come in my house, wash your boots first."

The man looked in dismay at his muddy boots. "This," he said, "is no time for trivialities. I think," he said, "we should be celebrating." He looked at her for a long time, as if looking might make her understand.

"If you've made my crystal buns fall in the oven," she exclaimed, "I'll hit you with a piece of wood!" She peered into a little hot oven. She came back, red, steamy-faced. Her eyes were sharp yellow, her skin was soft brown, she was thin and quick as an insect. Her voice was metallic and sharp. "Wait here. I'll see if I can let you have a moment with Mr. Ttt. What was your business?"

The man swore luridly, as if she'd hit his hand with a hammer. "Tell him we're from Earth and it's never been done before!"

"What hasn't?" She put her brown hand up. "Never mind. I'll be back."

The sound of her feet fluttered through the stone house.

Outside, the immense blue Martian sky was hot and still as a warm deep sea water. The Martian desert lay broiling like a prehistoric mud pot, waves of heat rising and shimmering. There was a small rocket ship reclining upon a hilltop nearby. Large footprints came from the rocket to the door of this stone house.

Now there was a sound of quarreling voices upstairs. The men within the door stared at one another, shifting on their boots, twiddling their fingers, and holding onto their hip belts. A man's voice shouted upstairs. The woman's voice replied. After fifteen minutes the Earth men began walking in and out the kitchen door, with nothing to do.

"Cigarette?" said one of the men.

Somebody got out a pack and they lit up. They puffed slow streams of pale white smoke. They adjusted their uniforms, fixed their collars. The voices upstairs continued to mutter and chant. The leader of the men looked at his watch.

"Twenty-five minutes," he said. "I wonder what they're up to up there. He went to a window and looked out.

"Hot day," said one of the men.

"Yeah," said someone else in the slow warm time of early afternoon. The voices had faded to a murmur and were now silent. There was not a sound in the house. All the men could hear was their own breathing.

An hour of silence passed. "I hope we didn't cause any trouble," said the captain. He went and peered into the living room.

Mrs. Ttt was there, watering some flowers that grew in the center of the room.

"I knew I had forgotten something," she said when she saw the captain. She walked out to the kitchen. "I'm sorry." She handed him a slip of paper. "Mr. Ttt is much too busy." She turned to her cooking. "Anyway, it's not Mr. Ttt you want to see, it's Mr. Aaa. Take that paper over to the next farm, by the blue canal, and Mr. Aaa'll advise you about whatever it is you want to know."

"We don't want to know anything," objected the captain, pouting out his thick lips. "We already *know* it."

"You have the paper, what more do you want?" she asked him straight off. And she would say no more.

"Well," said the captain, reluctant to go. He stood as if waiting for something. He looked like a child staring at an empty Christmas tree. "Well," he said again. "Come on, men."

The four men stepped out into the hot silent day.

Half an hour later, Mr. Aaa, seated in his library sipping a bit of electric fire from a metal cup, heard the voices outside in the stone causeway. He leaned over the window sill and gazed at the four uniformed men who squinted up at him.

"Are you Mr. Aaa?" they called.

"I am."

"Mr. Ttt sent us to see you!" shouted the captain.

"Why did he do that?" asked Mr. Aaa.

"He was busy!"

"Well, that's a shame," said Mr. Aaa sarcastically. "Does he think I have nothing else to do but entertain people he's too busy to bother with?"

"That's not the important thing, sir," shouted the captain.

"Well, it is to me. I have much reading to do. Mr. Ttt is inconsiderate. This is not the first time he has been this thoughtless of me. Stop waving your hands, sir, until I finish. And pay attention. People usually listen to me when I talk. And you'll listen courteously or I won't talk at all."

Uneasily the four men in the court shifted and opened their mouths, and once the captain, the veins on his face bulging, showed a few little tears in his eyes.

"Now," lectured Mr. Aaa, "do you think it fair of Mr. Ttt to be so ill-mannered?"

The four men gazed up through the heat. The captain said, "We're from Earth!"

"I think it very ungentlemanly of him," brooded Mr. Aaa.

"A *rocket* ship. We came in it. Over there!"

"Not the first time Ttt's been unreasonable, you know."

"All the way from Earth."

"Why, for half a mind, I'd call him up and tell him off."

"Just the four of us; myself and these three men, my crew."

"I'll call him up, yes, that's what I'll do!"

"Earth. Rocket. Men. Trip. Space."

"Call him and give him a good lashing!" cried Mr. Aaa. He vanished like a puppet from a stage. For a minute there were angry voices back and forth over some weird mechanism or other. Below, the captain and his crew glanced longingly back at their pretty rocket ship lying on the hillside, so sweet and lovely and fine.

Mr. Aaa jerked up in the window, wildly triumphant. "Challenged him to a duel, by the gods! A duel!"

"Mr. Aaa—" the captain started all over again, quietly.

"I'll shoot him dead, do you hear!"

"Mr. Aaa, I'd like to *tell* you. We came sixty million miles."

Mr. Aaa regarded the captain for the first time. "Where'd you say you were from?"

The captain flashed a white smile. Aside to his men he whispered, "*Now* we're getting someplace!" To Mr. Aaa he called, "We traveled sixty million miles. From Earth!"

Mr. Aaa yawned. "That's only *fifty* million miles this time of year." He picked up a frightful-looking weapon. "Well, I have to go now. Just take that silly note, though I don't know what good it'll do you, and go over that hill into the little town of Iopr and tell Mr. Iii all about it. *He's* the man you want to see. Not Mr. Ttt, he's an idiot; I'm going to kill him. Not me, because you're not in my line of work."

"Line of work, line of work!" bleated the captain. "Do you have to be in a certain line of work to welcome Earth *men*!"

"Don't be silly, everyone knows *that*!" Mr. Aaa rushed downstairs. "Good-by!" And down the causeway he raced, like a pair of wild calipers.

The four travelers stood shocked. Finally the captain said, "We'll find someone yet who'll listen to us."

"Maybe we could go out and come in again," said one of the men in a dreary voice. "Maybe we should take off and land again. Give them time to organize a party."

"That might be a good idea," murmured the tired captain.

The little town was full of people drifting in and out of doors, saying hello to one another, wearing golden masks and blue masks and crimson masks for pleasant variety, masks with silver lips and bronze eyebrows, masks that smiled or masks that frowned, according to the owners' dispositions.

The four men, wet from their long walk, paused and asked a little girl where Mr. Iii's house was.

"There." The child nodded her head.

The captain got eagerly, carefully down on one knee, looking into her sweet young face. "Little girl, I want to talk to you."

He seated her on his knee and folded her small brown hands neatly in his own big ones, as if ready for a bedtime story which he was shaping in his mind slowly and with a great patient happiness in details.

"Well, here's how it is, little girl. Six months ago another rocket came to Mars. There was a man named York in it, and his assistant. Whatever happened to them, we don't know. Maybe they crashed. They came in a rocket. So did we. You should see it! A *big* rocket! So we're the *Second* Expedition, following up the First. And we came all the way from Earth...."

The little girl disengaged one hand without thinking about it, and clapped an expressionless golden mask over her face. Then she pulled forth a golden spider toy and dropped it to the ground while the captain talked on. The toy spider climbed back up to her knee obediently, while she speculated upon it coolly through the slits of her emotionless mask and the captain shook her gently and urged his story upon her.

"We're Earth Men," he said. "Do you believe me?"

"Yes." The little girl peeped at the way she was wiggling her toes in the dust.

"Fine." The captain pinched her arm, a little bit with joviality, a little bit with meanness to get her to look at him. "We built our own rocket ship. Do you believe *that*?"

The little girl dug in her nose with a finger. "Yes."

"And—take your finger out of your nose, little girl—*I* am the captain, and—"

"Never before in history has anybody come across space in a big rocket ship," recited the little creature, eyes shut.

"Wonderful! How did you know?"

"Oh, telepathy." She wiped a casual finger on her knee.

"Well, aren't you just *ever* so excited?" cried the captain. "Aren't you glad?"

"You just better go see Mr. Iii right away." She dropped her toy to the ground. "Mr. Iii will like talking to you." She ran off, with the toy spider scuttling obediently after her.

The captain squatted there looking after her with his hand out. His eyes were watery in his head. He looked at his empty hands. His mouth hung open. The other three men stood with their shadows under them. They spat on the stone street....

Mr. Iii answered his door. He was on his way to a lecture, but he had a minute, if they would hurry inside and tell him what they desired....

"A little attention," said the captain, red-eyed and tired. "We're from Earth, we have a rocket, there are four of us, crew and captain, we're exhausted, we're hungry, we'd like a place to sleep. We'd like someone to give us the key to the city or something like that, and we'd like somebody to shake our hands and say 'Hooray' and say 'Congratulations, old man!' That about sums it up."

Mr. Iii was a tall, vaporous, thin man with thick blind blue crystals over his yellowish eyes. He bent over his desk and brooded upon some papers, glancing now and again with extreme penetration at his guests.

"Well, I haven't the forms with me here, I don't *think*." He rummaged through the desk drawers. "Now, where *did* I put the forms?" He mused. "Somewhere. Somewhere. Oh, *here* we are! Now!" He handed the papers over crisply. "You'll have to sign these papers, of course."

"Do we have to go through all this rigmarole?"

Mr. Iii gave him a thick glassy look. "You say you're from Earth, don't you? Well, then there's nothing for it but you sign."

The captain wrote his name. "Do you want my crew to sign also?"

Mr. Iii looked at the captain, looked at the three others, and burst into a shout of derision. "*Them* sign! Ho! How marvelous! Them, oh, *them* sign!" Tears sprang from his eyes. He slapped his knee and bent to let his laughter jerk out of his gaping mouth. He held himself up with the desk. "*Them* sign!"

The four men scowled. "What's funny?"

"Them sign!" sighed Mr. Iii, weak with hilarity. "So very funny. I'll have to tell Mr. Xxx about this!" He examined the filled-out form, still laughing. "Everything seems

to be in order." He nodded. "Even the agreement for euthanasia if final decision on such a step is necessary." He chuckled.

"Agreement for *what*?"

"Don't talk. I have something for you. Here. Take this key."

The captain flushed. "It's a great honor."

"Not the key to the city, you fool!" snapped Mr. Iii. "Just a key to the House. Go down that corridor, unlock the big door, and go inside and shut the door tight. You can spend the night there. In the morning I'll send Mr. Xxx to see you."

Dubiously the captain took the key in hand. He stood looking at the floor. His men did not move. They seemed to be emptied of all their blood and their rocket fever. They were drained dry.

"What is it? What's wrong?" inquired Mr. Iii. "What are you waiting for? What do you want?" He came and peered up into the captain's face, stooping. "Out with it, you!"

"I don't suppose you could even—" suggested the captain. "I mean, that is, try to, or think about..." He hesitated. "We've worked hard, we've come a long way, and maybe you could just shake our hands and say 'Well done!' do you—think?" His voice faded.

Mr. Iii stuck out his hand stiffly. "Congratulations!" He smiled a cold smile. "Congratulations." He turned away. "I must go now. Use that key."

Without noticing them again, as if they had melted down through the floor, Mr. Iii moved about the room packing a little manuscript case with papers. He was in the room another five minutes but never again addressed the solemn quartet that stood with heads down, their heavy legs sagging, the light dwindling from their eyes. When Mr. Iii went out the door he was busy looking at his fingernails....

They straggled along the corridor in the dull, silent afternoon light. They came to a large burnished silver door, and the silver key opened it. They entered, shut the door, and turned.

They were in a vast sunlit hall. Men and women sat at tables and stood in conversing groups. At the sound of the door they regarded the four uniformed men.

One Martian stepped forward, bowing. "I am Mr. Uuu," he said.

"And I am Captain Jonathan Williams, of New York City, on Earth," said the captain without emphasis.

Immediately the hall exploded!

The rafters trembled with shouts and cries. The people, rushing forward, waved and shrieked happily, knocking down tables, swarming, rollicking, seizing the four Earth Men, lifting them swiftly to their shoulders. They charged about the hall six times, six times making a full and wonderful circuit of the room, jumping, bounding, singing.

The Earth Men were so stunned that they rode the toppling shoulders for a full minute before they began to laugh and shout at each other:

"Hey! This is more *like* it!"

"This is the life! Boy! Yay! Yow! Whoopee!"

They winked tremendously at each other. They flung up their hands to clap the air. "Hey!"

"Hooray!" said the crowd.

They set the Earth Men on a table. The shouting died.

The captain almost broke into tears. "Thank you. It's good, it's good."

"Tell us about yourselves," suggested Mr. Uuu.

The captain cleared his throat.

The audience ohed and ahed as the captain talked. He introduced his crew; each made a small speech and was embarrassed by the thunderous applause.

Mr. Uuu clapped the captain's shoulder. "It's good to see another man from Earth. I am from Earth also."

"How was that again?"

"There are many of us here from Earth."

"You? From Earth?" The captain stared. "But is that possible? Did you come by rocket? Has space travel been going on for centuries?" His voice was disappointed. "What—what country are you from?"

"Tuiereol. I came by the spirit of my body, years ago."

"Tuiereol." The captain mouthed the word. "I don't know that country. What's this about spirit of body?"

"And Miss Rrr over here, she's from Earth, too, *aren't* you, Miss Rrr?"

Miss Rrr nodded and laughed strangely.

"And so is Mr. Www and Mr. Qqq and Mr. Vvv!"

"I'm from Jupiter," declared one man, preening himself.

"I'm from Saturn," said another, eyes glinting slyly.

"Jupiter, Saturn," murmured the captain, blinking.

It was very quiet now; the people stood around and sat at the tables which were strangely empty for banquet tables. Their yellow eyes were glowing, and there were dark shadows under their cheekbones. The captain noticed for the first time that there were no windows; the light seemed to permeate the walls. There was only one door. The captain winced. "This is confusing. Where on Earth is this Tuiereol? Is it near America?"

"What is America?"

"You never heard of America! You say you're from Earth and yet you don't know!"

Mr. Uuu drew himself up angrily. "Earth is a place of seas and nothing but seas. There is no land. I am from Earth, and know."

"Wait a minute." The captain sat back. "You look like a regular Martian. Yellow eyes. Brown skin."

"Earth is a place of all *jungle*," said Miss Rrr proudly. "I am from Orri, on Earth, a civilization built of silver!"

Now the captain turned his head from and then to Mr. Uuu and then to Mr. Www and Mr. Zzz and Mr. Nnn and Mr. Hhh and Mr. Bbb. He saw their yellow eyes waxing and waning in the light, focusing and unfocusing. He began to shiver. Finally he turned to his men and regarded them somberly.

"Do you realize what this is?"

"What, sir?"

"This is no celebration," replied the captain tiredly. "This is no banquet. These aren't government representatives. This is no surprise party. Look at their eyes. Listen to them!"

Nobody breathed. There was only a soft white move of eyes in the close room.

"Now I understand"—the captain's voice was far away—"why everyone gave us notes and passed us on, one from the other, until we met Mr. Iii, who sent us down a corridor with a key to open a door and shut a door. And here we are...."

"Where are we, sir?"

The captain exhaled. "In an insane asylum."

It was night. The large hall lay quiet and dimly illumined by hidden light sources in the transparent walls. The four Earth Men sat around a wooden table, their bleak heads bent over their whispers. On the floors, men and women lay huddled. There were little stirs in the dark corners, solitary men or women gesturing their hands. Every half-hour one of the captain's men would try the silver door and return to the table. "Nothing doing, sir. We're locked in proper."

"They think we're really insane, sir?"

"Quite. That's why there was no hullabaloo to welcome us. They merely tolerated what, to them, must be a constantly recurring psychotic condition." He gestured at the dark sleeping shapes all about them. "Paranoids, every single one! What a welcome they gave us! For a moment there"—a little fire rose and died in his eyes—"I thought we were getting our true reception. All the yelling and singing and speeches. Pretty nice, wasn't it—while it lasted?"

"How long will they keep us here, sir?"

"Until we prove we're not psychotics."

"That should be easy."

"I *hope* so."

"You don't sound very certain, sir."

"I'm not. Look in that corner."

A man squatted alone in darkness. Out of his mouth issued a blue flame which turned into the round shape of a small naked woman. It flourished on the air softly in vapors of cobalt light, whispering and sighing.

The captain nodded at another corner. A woman stood there, changing. First she was embedded in a crystal pillar, then she melted into a golden statue, finally a staff of polished cedar, and back to a woman.

All through the midnight hall people were juggling thin violet flames, shifting, changing, for nighttime was the time of change and affliction.

"Magicians, sorcerers," whispered one of the Earth Men.

"No, hallucination. They pass their insanity over into us so that we see their hallucinations too. Telepathy. Autosuggestion and telepathy."

"Is that what worries you, sir?"

"Yes. If hallucinations can appear this 'real' to us, to anyone, if hallucinations are catching and almost believable, it's no wonder they mistook us for psychotics.

If that man can produce little blue fire women and that woman there melt into a pillar, how natural if normal Martians think we produce our rocket ship with *our* minds."

"Oh," said his men in the shadows.

Around them, in the vast hall, flames leaped blue, flared, evaporated. Little demons of red sand ran between the teeth of sleeping men. Women became oily snakes. There was a smell of reptiles and animals.

In the morning everyone stood around looking fresh, happy, and normal. There were no flames or demons in the room. The captain and his men waited by the silver door, hoping it would open.

Mr. Xxx arrived after about four hours. They had a suspicion that he had waited outside the door, peering in at them for at least three hours before he stepped in, beckoned, and led them to his small office.

He was a jovial, smiling man, if one could believe the mask he wore, for upon it was painted not one smile, but three. Behind it, his voice was the voice of a not so smiling psychologist. "What seems to be the trouble?"

"You think we're insane, and we're not," said the captain.

"Contrarily, I do not think *all* of you are insane." The psychologist pointed a little wand at the captain. "No. Just *you*, sir. The others are secondary hallucinations."

The captain slapped his knee. "So *that's* it! That's why Mr. Iii laughed when I suggested my men sign the papers too!"

"Yes, Mr. Iii told me." The psychologist laughed out of the carved, smiling mouth. "A good joke. Where was I? Secondary hallucinations, yes. Women come to me with snakes crawling from their ears. When I cure them, the snakes vanish."

"We'll be glad to be cured. Go right ahead."

Mr. Xxx seemed surprised. "Unusual. Not many people want to be cured. The cure is drastic, you know."

"Cure ahead! I'm confident you'll find we're all sane."

"Let me check your papers to be sure they're in order for a 'cure.' He checked a file. "Yes. You know, such cases as yours need special 'curing.' The people in that hall are simpler forms. But once you've gone this far, I must point out, with primary, secondary, auditory, olfactory, and labial hallucinations, as well as tactile and optical fantasies, it is pretty bad business. We have to resort to euthanasia."

The captain leaped up with a roar. "Look here, we've stood quite enough! Test us, tap our knees, check our hearts, exercise us, ask questions!"

"You are free to speak."

The captain raved for an hour. The psychologist listened.

"Incredible," he mused. "Most detailed dream fantasy I've ever heard."

"God damn it, we'll show you the rocket ship!" screamed the captain.

"I'd like to see it. Can you manifest it in this room?"

"Oh, certainly. It's in that file of yours, under *R*."

Mr. Xxx peered seriously into his file. He went "Tsk" and shut the file solemnly. "Why did you tell me to look? The rocket isn't there."

"Of course not, you idiot! I was joking. Does an insane man joke?"

"You find some odd senses of humor. Now, take me out to your rocket. I wish to see it."

It was noon. The day was very hot when they reached the rocket.

"So." The psychologist walked up to the ship and tapped it. It gonged softly. "May I go inside?" he asked slyly.

"You may."

Mr. Xxx stepped in and was gone for a long time.

"Of all the silly, exasperating things." The captain chewed a cigar as he waited. "For two cents I'd go back home and tell people not to bother with Mars. What a suspicious bunch of louts."

"I gather that a good number of their population are insane, sir. That seems to be their main reason for doubting."

"Nevertheless, this is all so damned irritating."

The psychologist emerged from the ship after half an hour of prowling, tapping, listening, smelling, tasting.

"*Now* do you believe!" shouted the captain, as if he were deaf.

The psychologist shut his eyes and scratched his nose. "This is the most incredible example of sensual hallucination and hypnotic suggestion I've ever encountered. I went through your 'rocket,' as you call it." He tapped the hull. "I hear it. Auditory fantasy." He drew a breath. "I smell it. Olfactory hallucination, induced by sensual telepathy." He kissed the ship. "I taste it. Labial fantasy!"

He shook the captain's hand. "May I congratulate you? You are a psychotic genius! You have done a most complete job! The task of projecting your psychotic image life into the mind of another via telepathy and keeping the hallucinations from becoming sensually weaker is almost impossible. Those people in the House usually concentrate on visuals or, at the most, visuals and auditory fantasies combined. You have balanced the whole conglomeration! Your insanity is beautifully complete!"

"My insanity." The captain was pale.

"Yes, yes, what a lovely insanity. Metal, rubber, gravitizers, foods, clothing, fuel, weapons, ladders, nuts, bolts, spoons. Ten thousand separate items I checked on your vessel. Never have I seen such a complexity. There were even shadows under the bunks and under *everything*! Such concentration of will! And everything, no matter how or when tested, had a smell, solidity, a taste, a sound! Let me embrace you!"

He stood back at last. "I'll write this into my greatest monograph! I'll speak of it at the Martian Academy next month! *Look* at you! Why, you've even changed your eye color from yellow to blue, your skin to pink from brown. And those clothes, and your hands having five fingers instead of six! Biological metamorphosis through psychological imbalance! And your three friends—"

He took out a little gun. "Incurable, of course. You poor, wonderful man. You will be happier dead. Have you any last words?"

"Stop, for God's sake! Don't shoot!"

"You sad creature. I shall put you out of this misery which has driven you to imagine this rocket and these three men. It will be most engrossing to watch your friends and your rocket vanish once I have killed you. I will write a neat paper on the dissolvement of neurotic images from what I perceive here today."

"I'm from Earth! My name is Jonathan Williams, and these—"

"Yes, I know," soothed Mr. Xxx, and fired his gun.

The captain fell with a bullet in his heart. The other three men screamed.

Mr. Xxx stared at them. "You continue to exist? This is superb! Hallucinations with time and spatial persistence!" He pointed the gun at them. "Well, I'll scare you into dissolving."

"No!" cried the three men.

"An auditory appeal, even with the patient dead," observed Mr. Xxx as he shot the three men down.

They lay on the sand, intact, not moving.

He kicked them. Then he rapped on the ship.

"*It* persists! *They* persist!" He fired his gun again and again at the bodies. Then he stood back. The smiling mask dropped from his face.

Slowly the little psychologist's face changed. His jaw sagged. The gun dropped from his fingers. His eyes were dull and vacant. He put his hands up and turned in a blind circle. He fumbled at the bodies, saliva filling his mouth.

"Hallucinations," he mumbled frantically. "Taste. Sight. Smell. Sound. Feeling." He waved his hands. His eyes bulged. His mouth began to give off a faint froth.

"Go away!" he shouted at the bodies. "Go away!" he screamed at the ship. He examined his trembling hands. "Contaminated," he whispered wildly. "Carried over into me. Telepathy. Hypnosis. Now *I'm* insane. Now *I'm* contaminated. Hallucinations in all their sensual forms." He stopped and searched around with his numb hands for the gun. "Only one cure. Only one way to make them go away, vanish."

A shot rang out. Mr. Xxx fell.

The four bodies lay in the sun. Mr. Xxx lay where he fell.

The rocket reclined on the little sunny hill and didn't vanish.

When the town people found the rocket at sunset they wondered what it was. Nobody knew, so it was sold to a junkman and hauled off to be broken up for scrap metal.

That night it rained all night. The next day was fair and warm.

MARCH 2031:

THE TAXPAYER

He wanted to go to Mars on the rocket. He went down to the rocket field in the early morning and yelled in through the wire fence at the men in uniform that he wanted to go to Mars. He told them he was a taxpayer, his name was Pritchard, and he had a right to go to Mars. Wasn't he born right here in Ohio? Wasn't he a good citizen? Then why couldn't *he* go to Mars? He shook his fists at them and told them that he wanted to get away from Earth; anybody with any sense wanted to get away from Earth. There was going to be a big atomic war on Earth in about two years, and he didn't want to be here when it happened. He and thousands of others like him, if they had any sense, would go to Mars. See if they wouldn't! To get away from wars and censorship and statism and conscription and government control of this and that, of art and science! You could have Earth! He was offering his good right hand, his heart, his head, for the opportunity to go to Mars! What did you have to do, what did you have to sign, whom did you have to know, to get on the rocket?

They laughed out through the wire screen at him. He didn't want to go to Mars, they said. Didn't he know that the First and Second Expeditions had failed, had vanished; the men were probably dead?

But they couldn't prove it, they didn't know for *sure*, he said, clinging to the wire fence. Maybe it was a land of milk and honey up there, and Captain York and Captain Williams had just never bothered to come back. Now were they going to open the gate and let him in to board the Third Expeditionary Rocket, or was he going to have to kick it down?

They told him to shut up.

He saw the men walking out to the rocket.

Wait for me! he cried. Don't leave me here on this terrible world, I've got to get away; there's going to be an atom war! Don't leave me on Earth!

They dragged him, struggling, away. They slammed the police-wagon door and drove him off into the early morning, his face pressed to the rear window, and just before they sirened over a hill, he saw the red fire and heard the big sound and felt the huge tremor as the silver rocket shot up and left him behind on an ordinary Monday morning on the ordinary planet Earth.

APRIL 2031:

THE THIRD EXPEDITION

The ship came down from space. It came from the stars and the black velocities, and the shining movements, and the silent gulfs of space. It was a new ship; it had fire in its body and men in its metal cells, and it moved with a clean silence, fiery and warm. In it were seventeen men, including a captain. The crowd at the Ohio field had shouted and waved their hands up into the sunlight, and the rocket had bloomed out great flowers of heat and color and run away into space on the *third* voyage to Mars!

Now it was decelerating with metal efficiency in the upper Martian atmospheres. It was still a thing of beauty and strength. It had moved in the midnight waters of space like a pale sea leviathan; it had passed the ancient moon and thrown itself onward into one nothingness following another. The men within it had been battered, thrown about, sickened, made well again, each in his turn. One man had died, but now the remaining sixteen, with their eyes clear in their heads and their faces pressed to the thick glass ports, watched Mars swing up under them.

"Mars!" cried Navigator Lustig.

"Good old Mars!" said Samuel Hinkston, archaeologist.

"Well," said Captain John Black.

The rocket landed on a lawn of green grass. Outside, upon this lawn, stood an iron deer. Further up on the green stood a tall brown Victorian house, quiet in the sunlight, all covered with scrolls and rococo, its windows made of blue and pink and yellow and green colored glass. Upon the porch were hairy geraniums and an old swing which was hooked into the porch ceiling and which now swung back and forth, back and forth, in a little breeze. At the summit of the house was a cupola with diamond leaded-glass windows and a dunce-cap roof! Through the front window you could see a piece of music titled "Beautiful Ohio" sitting on the music rest.

Around the rocket in four directions spread the little town, green and motionless in the Martian spring. There were white houses and red brick ones, and tall elm trees blowing in the wind, and tall maples and horse chestnuts. And church steeples with golden bells silent in them.

The rocket men looked out and saw this. Then they looked at one another and then they looked out again. They held to each other's elbows, suddenly unable to breathe, it seemed. Their faces grew pale.

"I'll be damned," whispered Lustig, rubbing his face with his numb fingers. "I'll be damned."

"It just can't be," said Samuel Hinkston.

"Lord," said Captain John Black.

There was a call from the chemist. "Sir, the atmosphere is thin for breathing. But there's enough oxygen. It's safe."

"Then we'll go out," said Lustig.

"Hold on," said Captain John Black. "How do we know what this is?"

"It's a small town with thin but breathable air in it, sir."

"And it's a small town the like of Earth towns," said Hinkston, the archaeologist. "Incredible. It can't be, but it *is*."

Captain John Black looked at him idly. "Do you think that the civilizations of two planets can progress at the same rate and evolve in the same way, Hinkston?"

"I wouldn't have thought so, sir."

Captain Black stood by the port. "Look out there. The geraniums. A specialized plant. That specific variety has only been known on Earth for fifty years. Think of the thousands of years it takes to evolve plants. Then tell me if it is logical that the Martians should have: one, leaded-glass windows; two, cupolas; three, porch swings; four, an instrument that looks like a piano and probably *is* a piano; and five, if you look closely through this telescopic lens here, is it logical that a Martian composer would have published a piece of music titled, strangely enough, 'Beautiful Ohio'? All of which means that we have an Ohio River on Mars!"

"Captain Williams, of course!" cried Hinkston.

"What?"

"Captain Williams and his crew of three men! Or Nathaniel York and his partner. That would explain it!"

"That would explain absolutely nothing. As far as we've been able to figure, the York expedition exploded the day it reached Mars, killing York and his partner. As for Williams and his three men, their ship exploded the second day after their arrival. At least the pulsations from their radios ceased at that time, so we figure that if the men were alive after that they'd have contacted us. And anyway, the York expedition was only a year ago, while Captain Williams and his men landed here some time during last August. Theorizing that they are still alive, could they, even with the help of a brilliant Martian race, have built such a town as this and aged it in so short a time? Look at that town out there; why, it's been standing here for the last seventy years. Look at the wood on the porch newel; look at the trees, a century old, all of them! No, this isn't York's work or Williams'. It's something else. I don't like it. And I'm not leaving the ship until I know what it is."

"For that matter," said Lustig, nodding, "Williams and his men, as well as York, landed on the *opposite* side of Mars. We were very careful to land on *this* side."

"An excellent point. Just in case a hostile local tribe of Martians killed off York and Williams, we have instructions to land in a further region, to forestall a recurrence of such a disaster. So here we are, as far as we know, in a land that Williams and York never saw."

"Damn it," said Hinkston, "I want to get out into this town, sir, with your permission. It may be there are similar thought patterns, civilization graphs on every

planet in our sun system. We may be on the threshold of the greatest psychological and metaphysical discovery of our age!"

"I'm willing to wait a moment," said Captain John Black.

"It may be, sir, that we're looking upon a phenomenon that, for the first time, would absolutely prove the existence of God, sir."

"There are many people who are of good faith without such proof, Mr. Hinkston."

"I'm one myself, sir. But certainly a town like this could not occur without divine intervention. The *detail.* It fills me with such feelings that I don't know whether to laugh or cry."

"Do neither, then, until we know what we're up against."

"Up against?" Lustig broke in. "Against nothing, Captain. It's a good, quiet green town, a lot like the old-fashioned one I was born in. I like the looks of it."

"When were you born, Lustig?"

"Nineteen-fifty, sir."

"And you, Hinkston?"

"Nineteen fifty-five, sir. Grinnell, Iowa. And this looks like home to me."

"Hinkston, Lustig, I could be either of your fathers. I'm just eighty years old. Born in 1920 in Illinois, and through the grace of God and a science that, in the last fifty years, knows how to make *some* old men young again, here I am on Mars, not any more tired than the rest of you, but infinitely more suspicious. This town out here looks very peaceful and cool, and so much like Green Bluff, Illinois, that it frightens me. It's too *much* like Green Bluff." He turned to the radioman. "Radio Earth. Tell them we've landed. That's all. Tell them we'll radio a full report tomorrow."

"Yes, sir."

Captain Black looked out the rocket port with his face that should have been the face of a man eighty but seemed like the face of a man in his fortieth year. "Tell you what we'll do, Lustig; you and I and Hinkston'll look the town over. The other men'll stay aboard. If anything happens they can get the hell out. A loss of three men's better than a whole ship. If something bad happens, our crew can warn the next rocket. That's Captain Wilder's rocket, I think, due to be ready to take off next Christmas. If there's something hostile about Mars we certainly want the next rocket to be well armed."

"So are we. We've got a regular arsenal with us."

"Tell the men to stand by the guns then. Come on, Lustig, Hinkston."

The three men walked together down through the levels of the ship.

It was a beautiful spring day. A robin sat on a blossoming apple tree and sang continuously. Showers of petal snow sifted down when the wind touched the green branches, and the blossom scent drifted upon the air. Somewhere in the town someone was playing the piano and the music came and went, came and went, softly, drowsily. The song was "Beautiful Dreamer." Somewhere else a phonograph, scratchy and faded, was hissing out a record of "Roamin' in the Gloamin'," sung by Harry Lauder.

The three men stood outside the ship. They sucked and gasped at the thin, thin air and moved slowly so as not to tire themselves.

Now the phonograph record being played was:

"Oh, give me a June night
The moonlight and you..."

Lustig began to tremble. Samuel Hinkston did likewise.

'The sky was serene and quiet, and somewhere a stream of water ran through the cool caverns and tree shadings of a ravine. Somewhere a horse and wagon trotted and rolled by, bumping.

"Sir," said Samuel Hinkston, "it must be, it *has* to be, that rocket travel to Mars began in the years before the first World War!"

"No."

"How else can you explain these houses, the iron deer, the pianos, the music?" Hinkston took the captain's elbow persuasively and looked into the captain's face. "Say that there were people in the year 1905 who hated war and got together with some scientists in secret and built a rocket and came out here to Mars—"

"No, no, Hinkston."

"Why not? The world was a different world in 1905; they could have kept it a secret much more easily."

"But a complex thing like a rocket, no, you couldn't keep it secret."

"And they came up here to live, and naturally the houses they built were similar to Earth houses because they brought the culture with them."

"And they've lived here all these years?" said the captain.

"In peace and quiet, yes. Maybe they made a few trips, enough to bring enough people here for one small town, and then stopped for fear of being discovered. That's why this town seems so old-fashioned. I don't see a thing, myself, older than the year 1927, do you? Or maybe, sir, rocket travel is older than we think. Perhaps it started in some part of the world centuries ago and was kept secret by the small number of men who came to Mars with only occasional visits to Earth over the centuries."

"You make it sound almost reasonable."

"It has to be. We've the proof here before us; all we have to do is find some people and verify it."

Their boots were deadened of all sound in the thick green grass. It smelled from a fresh mowing. In spite of himself, Captain John Black felt a great peace come over him. It had been thirty years since he had been in a small town, and the buzzing of spring bees on the air lulled and quieted him, and the fresh look of things was a balm to the soul.

They set foot upon the porch. Hollow echoes sounded from under the boards as they walked to the screen door. Inside they could see a bead curtain hung across the hall entry, and a crystal chandelier and a Maxfield Parrish painting framed on one wall over a comfortable Morris chair. The house smelled old, and of the attic, and infi-

nitely comfortable. You could hear the tinkle of ice in a lemonade pitcher. In a distant kitchen, because of the heat of the day, someone was preparing a cold lunch. Someone was humming under her breath, high and sweet.

Captain John Black rang the bell.

Footsteps, dainty and thin, came along the hall, and a kind-faced lady of some forty years, dressed in the sort of dress you might expect in the year 1909, peered out at them.

"Can I help you?" she asked.

"Beg your pardon," said Captain Black uncertainly. "But we're looking for—that is, could you help us—" He stopped. She looked out at him with dark, wondering eyes.

"If you're selling something—" she began.

"No, wait!" he cried. "What town is this?"

She looked him up and down. "What do you mean, what town is it? How could you be in a town and not know the name?"

The captain looked as if he wanted to go sit under a shady apple tree. "We're strangers here. We want to know how this town got here and how you got here."

"Are you census takers?"

"No."

"Everyone knows," she said, "this town was built in 1868. Is this a game?"

"No, not a game!" cried the captain. "We're from Earth."

"Out of the *ground*, do you mean?" she wondered.

"No, we came from the third planet, Earth, in a ship. And we've landed here on the fourth planet, Mars—"

"This," explained the woman, as if she were addressing a child, "is Green Bluff, Illinois, on the continent of America, surrounded by the Atlantic and Pacific oceans, on a place called the world, or, sometimes, the Earth. Go away now. Good-by."

She trotted down the hall, running her fingers through the beaded curtains.

The three men looked at one another.

"Let's knock the screen door in," said Lustig.

"We can't do that. This is private property. Good God!"

They went to sit down on the porch step.

"Did it ever strike you, Hinkston, that perhaps we got ourselves somehow, in some way, off track, and by accident came back and landed on Earth?"

"How could we have done that?"

"I don't know, I don't know. Oh God, let me think."

Hinkston said, "But we checked every mile of the way. Our chronometers said so many miles. We went past the Moon and out into space, and here we are. I'm *positive* we're on Mars."

Lustig said, "But suppose, by accident, in space, in time, we got lost in the dimensions and landed on an Earth that is thirty or forty years ago."

"Oh, go away, Lustig!"

Lustig went to the door, rang the bell, and called into the cool dim rooms: "What year is this?"

"Nineteen twenty-six, of course," said the lady, sitting in a rocking chair, taking a sip of her lemonade.

"Did you hear that?" Lustig turned wildly to the others. "Nineteen twenty-six! We *have* gone back in time! This *is* Earth!"

Lustig sat down, and the three men let the wonder and terror of the thought afflict them. Their hands stirred fitfully on their knees. The captain said, "I didn't ask for a thing like this. It scares the hell out of me. How can a thing like this happen? I wish we'd brought Einstein with us."

"Will anyone in this town believe us?" said Hinkston. "Are we playing with something dangerous? Time, I mean. Shouldn't we just take off and go home?"

"No. Not until we try another house."

They walked three houses down to a little white cottage under an oak tree. "I like to be as logical as I can be," said the captain. "And I don't believe we've put our finger on it yet. Suppose, Hinkston, as you originally suggested, that rocket travel occurred years ago? And when the Earth people lived here a number of years they began to get homesick for Earth. First a mild neurosis about it, then a full-fledged psychosis. Then threatened insanity. What would you do as a psychiatrist if faced with such a problem?"

Hinkston thought. "Well, I think I'd rearrange the civilization on Mars so it resembled Earth more and more each day. If there was any way of reproducing every plant, every road, and every lake, and even an ocean, I'd do so. Then by some vast crowd hypnosis I'd convince everyone in a town this size that this really *was* Earth, not Mars at all."

"Good enough, Hinkston. I think we're on the right track now. That woman in that house back there just *thinks* she's living on Earth. It protects her sanity. She and all the others in this town are the patients of the greatest experiment in migration and hypnosis you will ever lay eyes on in your life."

"That's *it*, sir!" cried Lustig.

"Right!" said Hinkston.

"Well." The captain sighed. "Now we've got somewhere. I feel better. It's all a bit more logical. That talk about time and going back and forth and traveling through time turns my stomach upside down. But *this* way—" The captain smiled. "Well, well, it looks as if we'll be fairly popular here."

"Or will we?" said Lustig. "After all, like the Pilgrims, these people came here to escape Earth. Maybe they won't be too happy to see us. Maybe they'll try to drive us out or kill us."

"We have superior weapons. This next house now. Up we go."

But they had hardly crossed the lawn when Lustig stopped and looked off across the town, down the quiet, dreaming afternoon street. "Sir," he said.

"What is it, Lustig?"

"Oh, sir, *sir*, what I see—" said Lustig, and he began to cry. His fingers came up, twisting and shaking, and his face was all wonder and joy and incredulity. He sounded as if at any moment he might go quite insane with happiness. He looked down the street and began to run, stumbling awkwardly, falling, picking himself up, and running on. "Look, look!"

"Don't let him get away!" The captain broke into a run. Now Lustig was running swiftly, shouting. He turned into a yard halfway down the shady street and leaped up upon the porch of a large green house with an iron rooster on the roof.

He was beating at the door, hollering and crying, when Hinkston and the captain ran up behind him. They were all gasping and wheezing, exhausted from their run in the thin air. "Grandma! Grandpa!" cried Lustig.

Two old people stood in the doorway.

"David!" their voices piped, and they rushed out to embrace and pat him on the back and move around him. "David, oh, David, it's been so many years! How you've grown, boy; how big you are, boy. Oh, David boy, how are you?"

"Grandma, Grandpa!" sobbed David Lustig. "You look fine, fine!" He held them, turned them, kissed them, hugged them, cried on them, held them out again, blinking at the little old people. The sun was in the sky, the wind blew, the grass was green, the screen door stood wide.

"Come in, boy, come in. There's iced tea for you, fresh, lots of it!"

"I've got friends here." Lustig turned and waved at the captain and Hinkston frantically, laughing. "Captain, come on up."

"Howdy," said the old people. "Come in. Any friends of David's are our friends too. Don't stand there!"

In the living room of the old house it was cool, and a grandfather clock ticked high and long and bronzed in one corner. There were soft pillows on large couches and walls filled with books and a rug cut in a thick rose pattern, and iced tea in the hand, sweating, and cool on the thirsty tongue.

"Here's to our health." Grandma tipped her glass to her porcelain teeth.

"How long you been here, Grandma?" said Lustig.

"Ever since we died," she said tartly.

"Ever since you what?" Captain John Black set down his glass.

"Oh yes." Lustig nodded. "They've been dead thirty years."

"And you sit there calmly!" shouted the captain.

"Tush." The old woman winked glitteringly. "Who are you to question what happens? Here we are. What's life, anyway? Who does what for why and where? All we know is here we are, alive again, and no questions asked. A second chance." She toddled over and held out her thin wrist. "Feel." The captain felt. "Solid, ain't it?" she asked. He nodded. "Well, then," she said triumphantly, "why go around questioning?"

"Well," said the captain, "it's simply that we never thought we'd find a thing like this on Mars."

"And now you've found it. I dare say there's lots on every planet that'll show you God's infinite ways."

"Is this Heaven?" asked Hinkston.

"Nonsense, no. It's a world and we get a second chance. Nobody told us why. But then nobody told us why we were on Earth, either. That other Earth, I mean. The one you came from. How do we know there wasn't *another* before that one?"

"A good question," said the captain.

Lustig kept smiling at his grandparents. "Gosh, it's good to see you. Gosh, it's good."

The captain stood up and slapped his hand on his leg in a casual fashion. "We've got to be going. Thank you for the drinks."

"You'll be back, of course," said the old people. "For supper tonight?"

"We'll try to make it, thanks. There's so much to be done. My men are waiting for me back at the rocket and—" He stopped. He looked toward the door, startled.

Far away in the sunlight there was a sound of voices, a shouting and a great hello.

"What's that?" asked Hinkston.

"We'll soon find out." And Captain John Black was out the front door abruptly, running across the green lawn into the street of the Martian town.

He stood looking at the rocket. The ports were open and his crew was streaming out, waving their hands. A crowd of people had gathered, and in and through and among these people the members of the crew were hurrying, talking, laughing, shaking hands. People did little dances. People swarmed. The rocket lay empty and abandoned.

A brass band exploded in the sunlight, flinging off a gay tune from upraised tubas and trumpets. There was a bang of drums and a shrill of fifes. Little girls with golden hair jumped up and down. Little boys shouted, "Hooray!" Fat men passed around ten-cent cigars. The town mayor made a speech. Then each member of the crew, with a mother on one arm, a father or sister on the other, was spirited off down the street into little cottages or big mansions.

"Stop!" cried Captain Black.

The doors slammed shut.

The heat rose in the clear spring sky, and all was silent. The brass band banged off around a corner, leaving the rocket to shine and dazzle alone in the sunlight.

"Abandoned!" said the captain. "They abandoned the ship, they did! I'll have their skins, by God! They had orders!"

"Sir," said Lustig, "don't be too hard on them. Those were all old relatives and friends."

"That's no excuse!"

"Think how they felt, Captain, seeing familiar faces outside the ship!"

"They had their orders, damn it!"

"But how would you have felt, Captain?"

"I would have obeyed orders—" The captain's mouth remained open.

Striding along the sidewalk under the Martian sun, tall, smiling, eyes amazingly clear and blue, came a young man of some twenty-six years. "John!" the man called out, and broke into a trot.

"What?" Captain John Black swayed.

"John, you old son of a bitch!"

The man ran up and gripped his hand and slapped him on the back.

"It's you," said Captain Black.

"Of course, who'd you *think* it was?"

"Edward!" The captain appealed now to Lustig and Hinkston, holding the stranger's hand. "This is my brother Edward. Ed, meet my men, Lustig, Hinkston! My brother!"

They tugged at each other's hands and arms and then finally embraced. "Ed!" "John, you bum, you!" "You're looking fine, Ed, but, Ed, what *is* this? You haven't changed over the years. You died, I remember, when you were twenty-six and I was nineteen. Good God, so many years ago, and here you are and, Lord, what goes on?"

"Mom's waiting." said Edward Black, grinning.

"Mom?"

"And Dad too."

"Dad?" The captain almost fell as if he had been hit by a mighty weapon. He walked stiffly and without co-ordination. "Mom and Dad alive? Where?"

"At the old house on Oak Knoll Avenue."

"The old house." The captain stared in delighted amaze. "Did you hear that, Lustig, Hinkston?"

Hinkston was gone. He had seen his own house down the street and was running for it. Lustig was laughing. "You see, Captain, what happened to everyone on the rocket? They couldn't help themselves."

"Yes. Yes." The captain shut his eyes. "When I open my eyes you'll be gone." He blinked. "You're still there. God, Ed, but you look *fine*!"

"Come on, lunch's waiting. I told Mom."

Lustig said, "Sir, I'll be with my grandfolks if you need me."

"What? Oh, fine, Lustig. Later, then."

Edward seized his arm and marched him. "There's the house. Remember it?"

"Hell! Bet I can beat you to the front porch!"

They ran. The trees roared over Captain Black's head; the earth roared under his feet. He saw the golden figure of Edward Black pull ahead of him in the amazing dream of reality. He saw the house rush forward, the screen door swing wide. "Beat you!" cried Edward. "I'm an old man," panted the captain, "and you're still young. But then, you *always* beat me, I remember!"

In the doorway, Mom, pink, plump, and bright. Behind her, pepper-gray, Dad, his pipe in his hand.

"Mom, Dad!"

He ran up the steps like a child to meet them.

It was a fine long afternoon. They finished a late lunch and they sat in the parlor and he told them all about his rocket and they nodded and smiled upon him and Mother was just the same and Dad bit the end off a cigar and lighted it thoughtfully in his old fashion. There was a big turkey dinner at night and time flowing on. When the drumsticks were sucked clean and lay brittle upon the plates, the captain leaned

back and exhaled his deep satisfaction. Night was in all the trees and coloring the sky, and the lamps were halos of pink light in the gentle house. From all the other houses down the street came sounds of music, pianos playing, doors slamming.

Mom put a record on the victrola, and she and Captain John Black had a dance. She was wearing the same perfume he remembered from the summer when she and Dad had been killed in the train accident. She was very real in his arms as they danced lightly to the music. "It's not every day," she said, "you get a second chance to live."

"I'll wake in the morning," said the captain. "And I'll be in my rocket, in space, and all this will be gone."

"No, don't think that," she cried softly. "Don't question. God's good to us. Let's be happy."

"Sorry, Mom."

The record ended in a circular hissing.

"You're tired, Son." Dad pointed with his pipe. "Your old bedroom's waiting for you, brass bed and all."

"But I should report my men in."

"Why?"

"Why? Well, I don't know. No reason, I guess. No, none at all. They're all eating or in bed. A good night's sleep won't hurt them."

"Good night, Son." Mom kissed his cheek. "It's good to have you home."

"It's good to *be* home."

He left the land of cigar smoke and perfume and books and gentle light and ascended the stairs, talking, talking with Edward. Edward pushed a door open, and there was the yellow brass bed and the old semaphore banners from college and a very musty raccoon coat which he stroked with muted affection. "It's too much," said the captain. "I'm numb and I'm tired. Too much has happened today. I feel as if I'd been out in a pounding rain for forty-eight hours without an umbrella or a coat. I'm soaked to the skin with emotion."

Edward slapped wide the snowy linens and flounced the pillows. He slid the window up and let the night-blooming jasmine float in. There was moonlight and the sound of distant dancing and whispering.

"So this is Mars," said the captain, undressing.

"This is it." Edward undressed in idle, leisurely moves, drawing his shirt off over his head, revealing golden shoulders and the good muscular neck.

The lights were out; they were in bed, side by side, as in the days how many decades ago? The captain lolled and was nourished by the scent of jasmine pushing the lace curtains out upon the dark air of the room. Among the trees, upon a lawn, someone had cranked up a portable phonograph and now it was playing softly, "Always."

The thought of Marilyn came to his mind.

"Is Marilyn here?"

His brother, lying straight out in the moonlight from the window, waited and then said, "Yes. She's out of town. But she'll be here in the morning."

The captain shut his eyes. "I want to see Marilyn very much."

The room was square and quiet except for their breathing.

"Good night, Ed."

A pause. "Good night, John."

He lay peacefully, letting his thoughts float. For the first time the stress of the day was moved aside; he could think logically now. It had all been emotion. The bands playing, the familiar faces. But now...

How? he wondered. How was all this made? And why? For what purpose? Out of the goodness of some divine intervention? Was God, then, really that thoughtful of his children? How and why and what for?

He considered the various theories advanced in the first heat of the afternoon by Hinkston and Lustig. He let all kinds of new theories drop in lazy pebbles down through his mind, turning, throwing out dull flashes of light. Mom. Dad. Edward. Mars. Earth. Mars. Martians.

Who had lived here a thousand years ago on Mars? Martians? Or had this always been the way it was today?

Martians. He repeated the word idly, inwardly.

He laughed out loud almost. He had the most ridiculous theory quite suddenly. It gave him a kind of chill. It was really nothing to consider, of course. Highly improbable. Silly. Forget it. Ridiculous.

But, he thought, just *suppose*... Just suppose, now, that there were Martians living on Mars and they saw our ship coming and saw us inside our ship and hated us. Suppose, now, just for the hell of it, that they wanted to destroy us, as invaders, as unwanted ones, and they wanted to do it in a very clever way, so that we would be taken off guard. Well, what would the best weapon be that a Martian could use against Earth Men with atomic weapons?

The answer was interesting. Telepathy, hypnosis, memory, and imagination.

Suppose all of these houses aren't real at all, this bed not real, but only figments of my own imagination, given substance by telepathy and hypnosis through the Martians, thought Captain John Black. Suppose these houses are really some *other* shape, a Martian shape, but, by playing on my desires and wants, these Martians have made this seem like my old home town, my old house, to lull me out of my suspicions. What better way to fool a man, using his own mother and father as bait?

And this town, so old, from the year 1926, long before *any* of my men were born. From a year when I was six years old and there were records of Harry Lauder, and Maxfield Parrish paintings *still* hanging, and bead curtains, and "Beautiful Ohio," and turn-of-the-century architecture. What if the Martians took the memories of a town *exclusively* from *my* mind? They say childhood memories are the clearest. And after they built the town from *my* mind, they populated it with the most-loved people from all the minds of the people on the rocket!

And suppose those two people in the next room, asleep, are not my mother and father at all. But two Martians, incredibly brilliant, with the ability to keep me under this dreaming hypnosis all of the time.

And that brass band today? What a startlingly wonderful plan it would be. First, fool Lustig, then Hinkston, then gather a crowd; and all the men in the rocket, seeing mothers, aunts, uncles, sweethearts, dead ten, twenty years ago, naturally, disregarding orders, rush out and abandon ship. What more natural? What more unsuspecting?

What more simple? A man doesn't ask too many questions when his mother is suddenly brought back to life; he's much too happy. And here we all are tonight, in various houses, in various beds, with no weapons to protect us, and the rocket lies in the moonlight, empty. And wouldn't it be horrible and terrifying to discover that all of this was part of some great clever plan by the Martians to divide and conquer us, and kill us? Sometime during the night, perhaps, my brother here on this bed will change form, melt, shift, and become another thing, a terrible thing, a Martian. It would be very simple for him just to turn over in bed and put a knife into my heart. And in all those other houses down the street, a dozen other brothers or fathers suddenly melting away and taking knives and doing things to the unsuspecting, sleeping men of Earth....

His hands were shaking under the covers. His body was cold. Suddenly it was not a theory. Suddenly he was very afraid.

He lifted himself in bed and listened. The night was very quiet. The music had stopped. The wind had died. His brother lay sleeping beside him.

Carefully he lifted the covers, rolled them back. He slipped from bed and was walking softly across the room when his brother's voice said, "Where are you going?"

"What?"

His brother's voice was quite cold. "I said, where do you think you're going?"

"For a drink of water."

"But you're not thirsty."

"Yes, yes, I am."

"No, you're not."

Captain John Black broke and ran across the room. He screamed. He screamed twice.

He never reached the door.

In the morning the brass band played a mournful dirge. From every house in the street came little solemn processions bearing long boxes, and along the sun-filled street, weeping, came the grandmas and mothers and sisters and brothers and uncles and fathers, walking to the churchyard, where there were new holes freshly dug and new tombstones installed. Sixteen holes in all and sixteen tombstones.

The mayor made a little sad speech, his face sometimes looking like the mayor, sometimes looking like something else.

Mother and Father Black were there, with Brother Edward, and they cried, their faces melting now from a familiar face into something else.

Grandpa and Grandma Lustig were there, weeping, their faces shifting like wax, shimmering as all things shimmer on a hot day.

The coffins were lowered. Someone murmured about "the unexpected and sudden deaths of sixteen fine men during the night—"

Earth pounded down on the coffin lids.

The brass band, playing "Columbia, the Gem of the Ocean," marched and slammed back into town, and everyone took the day off.

JUNE 2032:

—AND THE MOON BE STILL AS BRIGHT

It was so cold when they first came from the rocket into the night that Spender began to gather the dry Martian wood and build a small fire. He didn't say anything about a celebration; he merely gathered the wood, set fire to it, and watched it burn.

In the flare that lighted the thin air of this dried-up sea of Mars he looked over his shoulder and saw the rocket that had brought them all, Captain Wilder and Cheroke and Hathaway and Sam Parkhill and himself, across a silent black space of stars to land upon a dead, dreaming world.

Jeff Spender waited for the noise. He watched the other men and waited for them to jump around and shout. It would happen as soon as the numbness of being the "first" men to Mars wore off. None of them said anything, but many of them were hoping, perhaps, that the other expeditions had failed and that this, the Fourth, would be *the* one. They meant nothing evil by it. But they stood thinking it, nevertheless, thinking of the honor and fame, while their lungs became accustomed to the thinness of the atmosphere, which almost made you drunk if you moved too quickly.

Gibbs walked over to the freshly ignited fire and said, "Why don't we use the ship chemical fire instead of that wood?"

"Never mind," said Spender, not looking up.

It wouldn't be right, the first night on Mars, to make a loud noise, to introduce a strange, silly bright thing like a stove. It would be a kind of imported blasphemy. There'd be time for that later; time to throw condensed-milk cans in the proud Martian canals; time for copies of the *New York Times* to blow and caper and rustle across the lone gray Martian sea bottoms; time for banana peels and picnic papers in the fluted, delicate ruins of the old Martian valley towns. Plenty of time for that. And he gave a small inward shiver at the thought.

He fed the fire by hand, and it was like an offering to a dead giant. They had landed on an immense tomb. Here a civilization had died. It was only simple courtesy that the first night be spent quietly.

"This isn't my idea of a celebration." Gibbs turned to Captain Wilder. "Sir, I thought we might break out rations of gin and meat and whoop it up a bit."

Captain Wilder looked off toward a dead city a mile away. "We're all tired," he said remotely, as if his whole attention was on the city and his men forgotten. "Tomorrow night, perhaps. Tonight we should be glad we got across all that space without getting a meteor in our bulkhead or having one man of us die."

The men shifted around. There were twenty of them, holding to each other's shoulders or adjusting their belts. Spender watched them. They were not satisfied. They had risked their lives to do a big thing. Now they wanted to be shouting drunk, firing off guns to show how wonderful they were to have kicked a hole in space and ridden a rocket all the way to Mars.

But nobody was yelling.

The captain gave a quiet order. One of the men ran into the ship and brought forth food tins which were opened and dished out without much noise. The men were beginning to talk now. The captain sat down and recounted the trip to them. They already knew it all, but it was good to hear about it, as something over and done and safely put away. They would not talk about the return trip. Someone brought that up, but they told him to keep quiet. The spoons moved in the double moonlight; the food tasted good and the wine was even better.

There was a touch of fire across the sky, and an instant later the auxiliary rocket landed beyond the camp. Spender watched as the small port opened and Hathaway, the physician-geologist—they were all men of twofold ability, to conserve space on the trip—stepped out. He walked slowly over to the captain.

"Well?" said Captain Wilder.

Hathaway gazed out at the distant cities twinkling in the starlight. After swallowing and focusing his eyes he said, "That city there, Captain, is dead and has been dead a good many thousand years. That applies to those three cities in the hills also. But that fifth city, two hundred miles over, sir—"

"What about it?"

"People were living in it last week, sir."

Spender got to his feet.

"Martians," said Hathaway.

"Where are they now?"

"Dead," said Hathaway. "I went into a house on one street. I thought that it, like the other towns and houses, had been dead for centuries. My God, there were bodies there. It was like walking in a pile of autumn leaves. Like sticks and pieces of burnt newspaper, that's all. And *fresh*. They'd been dead ten days at the outside."

"Did you check other towns? Did you see *anything* alive?"

"Nothing whatever. So I went out to check the other towns. Four out of five have been empty for thousands of years. What happened to the original inhabitants I haven't the faintest idea. But the fifth city always contained the same thing. Bodies. Thousands of bodies."

"What did they die of?" Spender moved forward.

"You won't believe it."

"What killed them?"

Hathaway said simply, "Chicken pox."

"My God, no!"

"Yes. I made tests. Chicken pox. It did things to the Martians it never did to Earth Men. Their metabolism reacted differently, I suppose. Burnt them black and dried them out to brittle flakes. But it's chicken pox, nevertheless. So York and Captain

Williams and Captain Black must have got through to Mars, all three expeditions. God knows what happened to them. But we at least know what *they* unintentionally did to the Martians."

"You saw no other life?"

"Chances are a few of the Martians, if they were smart, escaped to the mountains. But there aren't enough, I'll lay you money, to be a native problem. This planet is through."

Spender turned and went to sit at the fire, looking into it. Chicken pox, God, chicken pox, think of it! A race builds itself for a million years, refines itself, erects cities like those out there, does everything it can to give itself respect and beauty, and then it dies. Part of it dies slowly, in its own time, before our age, with dignity. But the rest! Does the rest of Mars die of a disease with a fine name or a terrifying name or a majestic name? No, in the name of all that's holy, it has to be chicken pox, a child's disease, a disease that doesn't even kill *children* on Earth! It's not right and it's not fair. It's like saying the Greeks died of mumps, or the proud Romans died on their beautiful hills of athlete's foot! If only we'd given the Martians time to arrange their death robes, lie down, look fit, and think up some other excuse for dying. It can't be a dirty, silly thing like chicken pox. It doesn't fit the architecture; it doesn't fit this entire world!

"All right, Hathaway, get yourself some food."

"Thank you, Captain."

And as quickly as that it was forgotten. The men talked among themselves.

Spender did not take his eyes off them. He left his food on his plate under his hands. He felt the land getting colder. The stars drew closer, very clear.

When anyone talked too loudly the captain would reply in a low voice that made them talk quietly from imitation.

The air smelled clean and new. Spender sat for a long time just enjoying the way it was made. It had a lot of things in it he couldn't identify: flowers, chemistries, dusts, winds.

"Then there was that time in New York when I got that blonde, what's her name?—Ginnie!" cried Biggs. "*That* was it!"

Spender tightened in. His hand began to quiver. His eves moved behind the thin, sparse lids.

"And Ginnie said to me—" cried Biggs.

The men roared.

"So I smacked her!" shouted Biggs with a bottle in his hand.

Spender set down his plate. He listened to the wind over his ears, cool and whispering. He looked at the cool ice of the white Martian buildings over there on the empty sea lands.

"What a woman, what a woman!" Biggs emptied his bottle in his wide mouth. "Of all the women I ever knew!"

The smell of Biggs's sweating body was on the air. Spender let the fire die. "Hey, kick her up there, Spender!" said Biggs, glancing at him for a moment, then back to his bottle. "Well, one night Ginnie and me—-"

A man named Schoenke got out his accordion and did a kicking dance, the dust springing up around him.

"Ahoo—I'm alive!" he shouted.

"Yay!" roared the men. They threw down their empty plates. Three of them lined up and kicked like chorus maidens, joking loudly. The others, clapping hands, yelled for something to happen. Cheroke pulled off his shirt and showed his naked chest, sweating as he whirled about. The moonlight shone on his crew cut hair and his young, clean-shaven cheeks.

In the sea bottom the wind stirred along faint vapors, and from the mountains great stone visages looked upon the silvery rocket and the small fire.

The noise got louder, more men jumped up, someone sucked on a mouth organ, someone else blew on a tissue-papered comb. Twenty more bottles were opened and drunk. Biggs staggered about, wagging his arms to direct the dancing men.

"Come on, sir!" cried Cheroke to the captain, wailing a song.

The captain had to join the dance. He didn't want to. His face was solemn. Spender watched, thinking: You poor man, what a night this is! They don't know what they're doing. They should have had an orientation program before they came to Mars to tell them how to look and how to walk around and be good for a few days.

"That does it." The captain begged off and sat down, saying he was exhausted. Spender looked at the captain's chest. It wasn't moving up and down very fast. His face wasn't sweaty, either.

Accordion, harmonica, wine, shout, dance, wail, roundabout, clash of pan, laughter.

Biggs weaved to the rim of the Martian canal. He carried six empty bottles and dropped them one by one into the deep blue canal waters. They made empty, hollow, drowning sounds as they sank.

"I christen thee, I christen thee, I christen thee—" said Biggs thickly. "I christen thee Biggs, Biggs, Biggs Canal—"

Spender was on his feet, over the fire, and alongside Biggs before anyone moved. He hit Biggs once in the teeth and once in the ear. Biggs toppled and fell down into the canal water. After the splash Spender waited silently for Biggs to climb back up onto the stone bank. By that time the men were holding Spender.

"Hey, what's eating you, Spender? Hey?" they asked.

Biggs climbed up and stood dripping. He saw the men holding Spender. "Well," he said, and started forward.

"That's enough," snapped Captain Wilder. The men broke away from Spender. Biggs stopped and glanced at the captain.

"All right, Biggs, get some dry clothes. You men, carry on your party! Spender, come with me!"

The men took up the party. Wilder moved off some distance and confronted Spender. "Suppose you explain what just happened," he said.

Spender looked at the canal. "I don't know. I was ashamed. Of Biggs and us and the noise. Christ, what a spectacle."

"It's been a long trip. They've got to have their fling."

"Where's their respect, sir? Where's their sense of the right thing?"

"You're tired, and you've a different way of seeing things, Spender. That's a fifty-dollar fine for you."

"Yes, sir. It was just the idea of Them watching us make fools of ourselves."

"Them?"

"The Martians, whether they're dead or not."

"Most certainly dead," said the captain. "Do you think They know we're here?"

"Doesn't an old thing always know when a new thing comes?"

"I suppose so. You sound as if you believe in spirits."

"I believe in the things that were done, and there are evidences of many things done on Mars. There are streets and houses, and there are books, I imagine, and big canals and clocks and places for stabling, if not horses, well, then some domestic animal, perhaps with twelve legs, who knows? Everywhere I look I see things that were *used.* They were touched and handled for centuries.

"Ask me, then, if I believe in the spirit of the things as they were used, and I'll say yes. They're all here. All the things which had uses. All the mountains which had names. And we'll never be able to use them without feeling uncomfortable. And somehow the mountains will never sound right to us; we'll give them new names, but the old names are there, somewhere in time, and the mountains were shaped and seen under those names. The names we'll give to the canals and mountains and cities will fall like so much water on the back of a mallard. No matter how we touch Mars, we'll never touch it. And then we'll get mad at it, and you know what we'll do? We'll rip it up, rip the skin off, and change it to fit ourselves."

"We won't ruin Mars," said the captain. "It's too big and too good."

"You think not? We Earth Men have a talent for ruining big, beautiful things. The only reason we didn't set up hot-dog stands in the midst of the Egyptian temple of Karnak is because it was out of the way and served no large commercial purpose. And Egypt is a small part of Earth. But here, this whole thing is ancient and different, and we have to set down somewhere and start fouling it up. We'll call the canal the Rockefeller Canal and the mountain King George Mountain and the sea the Dupont Sea, and there'll be Roosevelt and Lincoln and Coolidge cities and it won't ever be right, when there are the proper names for these places."

"That'll be your job, as archaeologist, to find out the old names, and we'll use them."

"A few men like us against *all* the commercial interests." Spender looked at the iron mountains. "*They* know we're here tonight, to spit in their wine, and I imagine they hate us."

The captain shook his head. "There's no hatred here." He listened to the wind. "From the look of their cities they were a graceful, beautiful, and philosophical people. They accepted what came to them. They acceded to racial death, that much we know, and without a last-moment war of frustration to tumble down their cities. Every town we've seen so far has been flawlessly intact. They probably don't mind us being here any more than they'd mind children playing on the lawn, knowing and understanding children for what they are. And, anyway, perhaps all this will change us for the better.

"Did you notice the peculiar quiet of the men, Spender, until Biggs forced them to get happy? They looked pretty humble and frightened. Looking at all this, we know we're not so hot; we're kids in rompers, shouting with our play rockets and

atoms, loud and alive. But one day Earth will be as Mars is today. This will sober us. It's an object lesson in civilizations. We'll learn from Mars. Now suck in your chin. Let's go back and play happy. That fifty-dollar fine still goes."

The party was not going too well. The wind kept coming in off the dead sea. It moved around the men and it moved around the captain and Jeff Spender as they returned to the group. The wind pulled at the dust and the shining rocket and pulled at the accordion, and the dust got into the vamped harmonica. The dust got in their eyes and the wind made a high singing sound in the air. As suddenly as it had come the wind died.

But the party had died too.

The men stood upright against the dark cold sky.

"Come on, gents, come on!" Biggs bounded from the ship in a fresh uniform, not looking at Spender even once. His voice was like someone in an empty auditorium. It was alone. "Come on!"

Nobody moved.

"Come on, Whitie, your harmonica!"

White blew a chord. It sounded funny and wrong. Whitie knocked the moisture from his harmonica and put it away.

"What kinda party *is* this?" Biggs wanted to know.

Someone hugged the accordion. It gave a sound like a dying animal. That was all.

"Okay, me and my bottle will go have our own party." Biggs squatted against the rocket, drinking from a flask.

Spender watched him. Spender did not move for a long time. Then his fingers crawled up along his trembling leg to his holstered pistol, very quietly, and stroked and tapped the leather sheath.

"All those who want to can come into the city with me," announced the captain. "We'll post a guard here at the rocket and go armed, just in case."

The men counted off. Fourteen of them wanted to go, including Biggs, who laughingly counted himself in, waving his bottle. Six others stayed behind.

"Here we go!" Biggs shouted.

The party moved out into the moonlight, silently. They made their way to the outer rim of the dreaming dead city in the light of the racing twin moons. Their shadows, under them, were double shadows. They did not breathe, or seemed not to, perhaps, for several minutes. They were waiting for something to stir in the dead city, some gray form to rise, some ancient, ancestral shape to come galloping across the vacant sea bottom on an ancient, armored steed of impossible lineage, of unbelievable derivation.

Spender filled the streets with his eyes and his mind. People moved like blue vapor lights on the cobbled avenues, and there were faint murmurs of sound, and odd animals scurrying across the gray-red sands. Each window was given a person who leaned from it and waved slowly, as if under a timeless water, at some moving form in the fathoms of space below the moon-silvered towers. Music was played on some inner ear, and Spender imagined the shape of such instruments to evoke such music. The land was haunted.

"Hey!" shouted Biggs, standing tall, his hands around his open mouth. "Hey, you people in the city there, you!"

"Biggs!" said the captain.

Biggs quieted.

They walked forward on a tiled avenue. They were all whispering now, for it was like entering a vast open library or a mausoleum in which the wind lived and over which the stars shone. The captain spoke quietly. He wondered where the people had gone, and what they had been, and who their kings were, and how they had died. And he wondered, quietly aloud, how they had built this city to last the ages through, and had they ever come to Earth? Were they ancestors of Earth Men ten thousand years removed? And had they loved and hated similar loves and hates, and done similar silly things when silly things were done?

Nobody moved. The moons held and froze them; the wind beat slowly around them.

"Lord Byron," said Jeff Spender.

"Lord who?" The captain turned and regarded him.

"Lord Byron, a nineteenth-century poet. He wrote a poem a long time ago that fits this city and how the Martians must feel, if there's anything left of them to feel. It might have been written by the last Martian poet."

The men stood motionless, their shadows under them.

The captain said, "How does the poem go, Spender?"

Spender shifted, put out his hand to remember, squinted silently a moment; then, remembering, his slow quiet voice repeated the words and the men listened to everything he said:

"So we'll go no more a-roving
So late into the night,
Though the heart be still as loving,
And the moon be still as bright."

The city was gray and high and motionless. The men's faces were turned in the light.

"For the sword outwears its sheath,
And the soul wears out the breast,
And the heart must pause to breathe,
And love itself must rest.

"Though the night was made for loving,
And the day returns too soon,
Yet we'll go no more a-roving
By the light of the moon."

Without a word the Earth Men stood in the center of the city. It was a clear night. There was not a sound except the wind. At their feet lay a tile court worked into the shapes of ancient animals and peoples. They looked down upon it.

Biggs made a sick noise in his throat. His eyes were dull. His hands went to his mouth; he choked, shut his eyes, bent, and a thick rush of fluid filled his mouth, spilled out, fell to splash on the tiles, covering the designs. Biggs did this twice. A sharp winy stench filled the cool air.

No one moved to help Biggs. He went on being sick.

Spender stared for a moment, then turned and walked off into the avenues of the city, alone in the moonlight. Never once did he pause to look back at the gathered men there.

They turned in at four in the morning. They lay upon blankets and shut their eyes and breathed the quiet air. Captain Wilder sat feeding little sticks into the fire.

McClure opened his eyes two hours later. "Aren't you sleeping, sir?"

"I'm waiting for Spender." The captain smiled faintly.

McClure thought it over. "You know, sir, I don't think he'll ever come back. I don't know how I know, but that's the way I feel about him, sir; he'll never come back."

McClure rolled over into sleep. The fire crackled and died.

Spender did not return in the following week. The captain sent searching parties, but they came back saying they didn't know where Spender could have gone. He would be back when he got good and ready. He was a sorehead, they said. To the devil with him!

The captain said nothing but wrote it down in his log....

It was a morning that might have been a Monday or a Tuesday or any day on Mars. Biggs was on the canal rim; his feet hung down into the cool water, soaking, while he took the sun on his face.

A man walked along the bank of the canal. The man threw a shadow down upon Biggs. Biggs glanced up.

"Well, I'll be damned!" said Biggs.

"I'm the last Martian," said the man, taking out a gun.

"What did you say?" asked Biggs.

"I'm going to kill you."

"Cut it. What kind of joke's that, Spender?"

"Stand up and take it in the stomach."

"For Christ's sake, put that gun away."

Spender pulled the trigger only once. Biggs sat on the edge of the canal for a moment before he leaned forward and fell into the water. The gun had made only a whispering hum. The body drifted with slow unconcern under the slow canal tides. It made a hollow bubbling sound that ceased after a moment.

Spender shoved his gun into its holster and walked soundlessly away. The sun was shining down upon Mars. He felt it burn his hands and slide over the sides of his tight face. He did not run; he walked as if nothing were new except the daylight. He walked

down to the rocket, and some of the men were eating a freshly cooked breakfast under a shelter built by Cookie.

"Here comes The Lonely One," someone said.

"Hello, Spender! Long time no see!"

The four men at the table regarded the silent man who stood looking back at them.

"You and them goddamn ruins," laughed Cookie, stirring a black substance in a crock. "You're like a dog in a bone yard."

"Maybe," said Spender, "I've been finding out things. What would you say if I said I'd found a Martian prowling around?"

The four men laid down their forks.

"Did you? Where?"

"Never mind. Let me ask you a question. How would you feel if you were a Martian and people came to your land and started tearing it up?"

"I know exactly how I'd feel," said Cheroke. "I've got some Cherokee blood in me. My grandfather told me lots of things about Oklahoma Territory. If there's a Martian around, I'm all for him."

"What about you other men?" asked Spender carefully.

Nobody answered; their silence was talk enough. Catch as catch can, finder's keepers, if the other fellow turns his cheek slap it hard, etc....

"Well," said Spender, "I've found a Martian."

The men squinted at him.

"Up in a dead town. I didn't think I'd find him. I didn't intend looking him up. I don't know what he was doing there. I've been living in a little valley town for about a week, learning how to read the ancient books and looking at their old art forms. And one day I saw this Martian. He stood there for a moment and then he was gone. He didn't come back for another day. I sat around, learning how to read the old writing, and the Martian came back, each time a little nearer, until on the day I learned how to decipher the Martian language—it's amazingly simple and there are picturegraphs to help you—the Martian appeared before me and said, 'Give me your boots.' And I gave him my boots and he said, 'Give me your uniform and all the rest of your apparel.' And I gave him all of that, and then he said, 'Give me your gun,' and I gave him my gun. 'Then he said, 'Now come along and watch what happens.' And the Martian walked down into camp and he's here now."

"I don't see any Martian," said Cheroke.

"I'm sorry."

Spender took out his gun. It hummed softly. The first bullet got the man on the left; the second and third bullets took the men on the right and the center of the table. Cookie turned in horror from the fire to receive the fourth bullet. He fell back into the fire and lay there while his clothes caught fire.

The rocket lay in the sun. Three men sat at breakfast, their hands on the table, not moving, their food getting cold in front of them. Cheroke, untouched, sat alone, staring in numb disbelief at Spender.

"You can come with me," said Spender.

Cheroke said nothing.

"You can be with me on this." Spender waited.

Finally Cheroke was able to speak. "You killed them," he said, daring to look at the men around him.

"They deserved it."

"You're crazy!"

"Maybe I am. But you can come with me."

"Come with you, for what?" cried Cheroke, the color gone from his face, his eyes watering. "Go on, get out!"

Spender's face hardened. "Of all of them, I thought you would understand."

"Get out!" Cheroke reached for his gun.

Spender fired one last time. Cheroke stopped moving.

Now Spender swayed. He put his hand to his sweating face. He glanced at the rocket and suddenly began to shake all over. He almost fell, the physical reaction was so overwhelming. His face held an expression of one awakening from hypnosis, from a dream. He sat down for a moment and told the shaking to go away.

"Stop it, stop it!" he commanded of his body. Every fiber of him was quivering and shaking. "Stop it!" He crushed his body with his mind until all the shaking was squeezed out of it. His hands lay calmly now upon his silent knees.

He arose and strapped a portable storage locker on his back with quiet efficiency. His hand began to tremble again, just for a breath of an instant, but he said, "No!" very firmly, and the trembling passed. Then, walking stiffly, he moved out between the hot red hills of the land, alone.

The sun burned farther up the sky. An hour later the captain climbed down out of the rocket to get some ham and eggs. He was just saying hello to the four men sitting there when he stopped and noticed a faint smell of gun fumes on the air. He saw the cook lying on the ground, with the campfire under him. The four men sat before food that was now cold.

A moment later Parkhill and two others climbed down. The captain stood in their way, fascinated by the silent men and the way they sat at their breakfast.

"Call the men, all of them," said the captain.

Parkhill hurried off down the canal rim.

The captain touched Cheroke. Cheroke twisted quietly and fell from his chair. Sunlight burned in his bristled short hair and on his high cheekbones.

The men came in.

"Who's missing?"

"It's still Spender, sir. We found Biggs floating in the canal."

"Spender!"

The captain saw the hills rising in the daylight. The sun showed his teeth in a grimace. "Damn him," he said tiredly. "Why didn't he come and talk to me?"

"He should've talked to *me*," cried Parkhill, eyes blazing. "I'd have shot his bloody brains out, that's what I'd have done, by God!"

Captain Wilder nodded at two of his men. "Get shovels," he said.

It was hot digging the graves. A warm wind came from over the vacant sea and blew the dust into their faces as the captain turned the Bible pages. When the captain closed the book someone began shoveling slow streams of sand down upon the wrapped figures.

They walked back to the rocket, clicked the mechanisms of their rifles, put thick grenade packets on their backs, and checked the free play of pistols in their holsters. They were each assigned a certain part of the hills. The captain directed them without raising his voice or moving his hands where they hung at his sides.

"Let's go," he said.

Spender saw the thin dust rising in several places in the valley and he knew the pursuit was organized and ready. He put down the thin silver book that he had been reading as he sat easily on a flat boulder. The book's pages were tissue-thin, pure silver, hand-painted in black and gold. It was a book of philosophy at least ten thousand years old he had found in one of the villas of a Martian valley town. He was reluctant to lay it aside.

For a time he had thought, What's the use? I'll sit here reading until they come along and shoot me.

The first reaction to his killing the six men this morning had caused a period of stunned blankness, then sickness, and now, a strange peace. But the peace was passing, too, for he saw the dust billowing from the trails of the hunting men, and he experienced the return of resentment.

He took a drink of cool water from his hip canteen. Then he stood up, stretched, yawned, and listened to the peaceful wonder of the valley around him. How very fine if he and a few others he knew on Earth could be here, live out their lives here, without a sound or a worry.

He carried the book with him in one hand, the pistol ready in his other. There was a little swift-running stream filled with white pebbles and rocks where he undressed and waded in for a brief washing. He took all the time he wanted before dressing and picking up his gun again.

The firing began about three in the afternoon. By then Spender was high in the hills. They followed him through three small Martian hill towns. Above the towns, scattered like pebbles, were single villas where ancient families had found a brook, a green spot, and laid out a tile pool, a library, and a court with a pulsing fountain. Spender took half an hour, swimming in one of the pools which was filled with the seasonal rain, waiting for the pursuers to catch up with him.

Shots rang out as he was leaving the little villa. Tile chipped up some twenty feet behind him, exploded. He broke into a trot, moved behind a series of small bluffs, turned, and with his first shot dropped one of the men dead in his tracks.

They would form a net, a circle; Spender knew that. They would go around and close in and they would get him. It was a strange thing that the grenades were not used. Captain Wilder could easily order the grenades tossed.

But I'm much too nice to be blown to bits, thought Spender. That's what the captain thinks. He wants me with only one hole in me. Isn't that odd? He wants my death to be clean. Nothing messy. Why? Because he understands me. And because he understands, he's willing to risk good men to give me a clean shot in the head. Isn't that it?

Nine, ten shots broke out in a rattle. Rocks around him jumped up. Spender fired steadily, sometimes while glancing at the silver book he carried in his hand.

The captain ran in the hot sunlight with a rifle in his hands. Spender followed him in his pistol sights but did not fire. Instead he shifted and blew the top off a rock where Whitie lay, and heard an angry shout.

Suddenly the captain stood up. He had a white handkerchief in his hands. He said something to his men and came walking up the mountain after putting aside his rifle. Spender lay there, then got to his feet, his pistol ready.

The captain came up and sat down on a warm boulder, not looking at Spender for a moment.

The captain reached into his blouse pocket. Spender's fingers tightened on the pistol.

The captain said, "Cigarette?"

"Thanks." Spender took one.

"Light?"

"Got my own."

They took one or two puffs in silence.

"Warm," said the captain.

"It is."

"You comfortable up here?"

"Quite."

"How long do you think you can hold out?"

"About twelve men's worth."

"Why didn't you kill all of us this morning when you had the chance? You could have, you know."

"I know. I got sick. When you want to do a thing badly enough you lie to yourself. You say the other people are all wrong. Well, soon after I started killing people I realized they were just fools and I shouldn't be killing them. But it was too late. I couldn't go on with it then, so I came up here where I could lie to myself some more and get angry, to build it all up again."

"Is it built up?"

"Not very high. Enough."

The captain considered his cigarette. "Why did you do it?"

Spender quietly laid his pistol at his feet. "Because I've seen that what these Martians had was just as good as anything we'll ever hope to have. They stopped where we should have stopped a hundred years ago. I've walked in their cities and I know these people and I'd be glad to call them my ancestors."

"They have a beautiful city there." The captain nodded at one of several places.

"It's not that alone. Yes, their cities are good. They knew how to blend art into their living. It's always been a thing apart for Americans. Art was something you kept

in the crazy son's room upstairs. Art was something you took in Sunday doses, mixed with religion, perhaps. Well, these Martians have art and religion and everything."

"You think they knew what it was all about, do you?"

"For my money."

"And for that reason you started shooting people."

"When I was a kid my folks took me to visit Mexico City. I'll always remember the way my father acted—loud and big. And my mother didn't like the people because they were dark and didn't wash enough. And my sister wouldn't talk to most of them. I was the only one really liked it. And I can see my mother and father coming to Mars and acting the same way here.

"Anything that's strange is no good to the average American. If it doesn't have Chicago plumbing, it's nonsense. The thought of that! Oh God, the thought of that! And then—the war. You heard the congressional speeches before we left. If things work out they hope to establish three atomic research and atom bomb depots on Mars. That means Mars is finished; all this wonderful stuff gone. How would you feel if a Martian vomited stale liquor on the White House floor?"

The captain said nothing but listened.

Spender continued: "And then the other power interests coming up. The mineral men and the travel men. Do you remember what happened to Mexico when Cortez and his very fine good friends arrived from Spain? A whole civilization destroyed by greedy, righteous bigots. History will never forgive Cortez."

"You haven't acted ethically yourself today," observed the captain.

"What could I do? Argue with you? It's simply me against the whole crooked grinding greedy setup on Earth. They'll be flopping their filthy atom bombs up here, fighting for bases to have wars. Isn't it enough they've ruined one planet, without ruining another; do they have to foul someone else's manger? The simple-minded windbags. When I got up here I felt I was not only free of their so-called culture, I felt I was free of their ethics and their customs. I'm out of their frame of reference, I thought. All I have to do is kill you all off and live my own life."

"But it didn't work out," said the captain.

"No. After the fifth killing at breakfast, I discovered I wasn't all new, all Martian, after all. I couldn't throw away everything I had learned on Earth so easily. But now I'm feeling steady again. I'll kill you all off. That'll delay the next trip in a rocket for a good five years. There's no other rocket in existence today, save this one. The people on Earth will wait a year, two years, and then when they hear nothing from us, they'll be very afraid to build a new rocket. They'll take twice as long and make a hundred extra experimental models to insure themselves against another failure."

"You're correct."

"A good report from you, on the other hand, if you returned, would hasten the whole invasion of Mars. If I'm lucky I'll live to be sixty years old. Every expedition that lands on Mars will be met by me. There won't be more than one ship at a time coming up, one every year or so, and never more than twenty men in the crew. After I've made friends with them and explained that our rocket exploded one day—I intend to blow it up after I finish my job this week—I'll kill them off, every one of

them. Mars will be untouched for the next half century. After a while, perhaps the Earth people will give up trying. Remember how they grew leery of the idea of building Zeppelins that were always going down in flames?"

"You've got it all planned," admitted the captain.

"I have."

"Yet you're outnumbered. In an hour we'll have you surrounded. In an hour you'll be dead."

"I've found some underground passages and a place to live you'll never find. I'll withdraw there to live for a few weeks. Until you're off guard. I'll come out then to pick you off, one by one."

The captain nodded. "Tell me about your civilization here," he said, waving his hand at the mountain towns.

"They knew how to live with nature and get along with nature. They didn't try too hard to be all men and no animal. That's the mistake we made when Darwin showed up. We embraced him and Huxley and Freud, all smiles. And then we discovered that Darwin and our religions didn't mix. Or at least we didn't think they did. We were fools. We tried to budge Darwin and Huxley and Freud. They wouldn't move very well. So, like idiots, we tried knocking down religion.

"We succeeded pretty well. We lost our faith and went around wondering what life was for. If art was no more than a frustrated outflinging of desire, if religion was no more than self-delusion, what good was life? Faith had always given us answers to all things. But it all went down the drain with Freud and Darwin. We were and still are a lost people."

"And these Martians are a *found* people?" inquired the captain.

"Yes. They knew how to combine science and religion so the two worked side by side, neither denying the other, each enriching the other."

"That sounds ideal."

"It was. I'd like to show you how the Martians did it."

"My men are waiting."

"We'll be gone half an hour. Tell them that, sir."

The captain hesitated, then rose and called an order down the hill.

Spender led him over into a little Martian village built all of cool perfect marble. There were great friezes of beautiful animals, white-limbed cat things and yellow-limbed sun symbols, and statues of bull-like creatures and statues of men and women and huge fine-featured dogs.

"There's your answer, Captain."

"I don't see."

"The Martians discovered the secret of life among animals. The animal does not question life. It lives. Its very reason for living *is* life; it enjoys and relishes life. You see—the statuary, the animal symbols, again and again."

"It looks pagan."

"On the contrary, those are God symbols, symbols of life. Man had become too much man and not enough animal on Mars too. And the men of Mars realized that in order to survive they would have to forgo asking that one question any longer: *Why*

live? Life was its own answer. Life was the propagation of more life and the living of as good a life as possible. The Martians realized that they asked the question 'Why live at all?' at the height of some period of war and despair, when there was no answer. But once the civilization calmed, quieted, and wars ceased, the question became senseless in a new way. Life was now good and needed no arguments."

"It sounds as if the Martians were quite naïve."

"Only when it paid to be naïve. They quit trying too hard to destroy everything, to humble everything. They blended religion and art and science because, at base, science is no more than an investigation of a miracle we can never explain, and art is an interpretation of that miracle. They never let science crush the aesthetic and the beautiful. It's all simply a matter of degree. An Earth Man thinks: 'In that picture, color does not exist, really. A scientist can prove that color is only the way the cells are placed in a certain material to reflect light. Therefore, color is not really an actual part of things I happen to see.' A Martian, far cleverer, would say: 'This is a fine picture. It came from the hand and the mind of a man inspired. Its idea and its color are from life. This thing is good'."

There was a pause. Sitting in the afternoon sun, the captain looked curiously around at the little silent cool town.

"I'd like to live here," he said.

"You may if you want."

"You ask *me* that?"

"Will any of those men under you ever really understand all this? They're professional cynics, and it's too late for them. Why do you want to go back with them? So you can keep up with the Joneses? To buy a gyro just like Smith has? To listen to music with your pocketbook instead of your glands? There's a little patio down here with a reel of Martian music in it at least fifty thousand years old. It still plays. Music you'll never hear in your life. You could hear it. There are books. I've gotten on well in reading them already. You could sit and read."

"It all sounds quite wonderful, Spender."

"But you won't stay?"

"No. Thanks, anyway."

"And you certainly won't let me stay without trouble. I'll have to kill you all."

"You're optimistic."

"I have something to fight for and live for; that makes me a better killer. I've got what amounts to a religion, now. It's learning how to breathe all over again. And how to lie in the sun getting a tan, letting the sun work into you. And how to hear music and how to read a book. What does your civilization offer?"

The captain shifted his feet. He shook his head. "I'm sorry this is happening. I'm sorry about it all."

"I am too. I guess I'd better take you back now so you can start the attack."

"I guess so."

"Captain, I won't kill you. When it's all over, you'll still be alive."

"What?"

"I decided when I started that you'd be untouched."

"Well..."

"I'll save you out from the rest. When they're dead, perhaps you'll change your mind."

"No," said the captain. "There's too much Earth blood in me. I'll have to keep after you."

"Even when you have a chance to stay here?"

"It's funny, but yes, even with that. I don't know why. I've never asked myself. Well, here we are." They had returned to their meeting place now. "Will you come quietly, Spender? This is my last offer."

"Thanks, no." Spender put out his hand. "One last thing. If you win, do me a favor. See what can be done to restrict tearing this planet apart, at least for fifty years, until the archaeologists have had a decent chance, will you?"

"Right."

"And last—if it helps any, just think of me as a very crazy fellow who went berserk one summer day and never was right again. It'll be a little easier on you that way."

"I'll think it over. So long, Spender. Good luck."

"You're an odd one," said Spender as the captain walked back down the trail in the warm-blowing wind.

The captain returned like something lost to his dusty men. He kept squinting at the sun and breathing hard.

"Is there a drink?" he said. He felt a bottle put cool into his hand. "Thanks." He drank. He wiped his mouth.

"All right," he said. "Be careful. We have all the time we want. I don't want any more lost. You'll have to kill him. He won't come down. Make it a clean shot if you can. Don't mess him. Get it over with."

"I'll blow his damned brains out," said Sam Parkhill.

"No, through the chest," said the captain. He could see Spender's strong, clearly determined face.

"His bloody brains," said Parkhill.

The captain handed him the bottle jerkingly. "You heard what I said. Through the chest."

Parkhill muttered to himself.

"Now," said the captain.

They spread again, walking and then running, and then walking on the hot hillside places where there would be sudden cool grottoes that smelled of moss, and sudden open blasting places that smelled of sun on stone.

I hate being clever, thought the captain, when you don't really feel clever and don't want to *be* clever. To sneak around and make plans and feel big about making

them. I hate this feeling of thinking I'm doing right when I'm not really certain I am. Who are we, anyway? The majority? Is that the answer? The majority is always holy, is it not? Always, always; just never wrong for one little insignificant tiny moment, is it? Never ever wrong in ten million years? He thought: What is this majority and who are in it? And what do they think and how did they get that way and will they ever change and how the devil did I get caught in this rotten majority? I don't feel comfortable. Is it claustrophobia, fear of crowds, or common sense? Can one man be right, while all the world thinks they are right? Let's not think about it. Let's crawl around and act exciting and pull the trigger. There, and *there*!

The men ran and ducked and ran and squatted in shadows and showed their teeth, gasping, for the air was thin, not meant for running; the air was thin and they had to sit for five minutes at a time, wheezing and seeing black lights in their eyes, eating at the thin air and wanting more, tightening their eyes, and at last getting up, lifting their guns to tear holes in that thin summer air, holes of sound and heat.

Spender remained where he was, firing only on occasion.

"Damned brains all over!" Parkhill yelled, running uphill.

The captain aimed his gun at Sam Parkhill. He put it down and stared at it in horror. "What were you doing?" he asked of his limp hand and the gun.

He had almost shot Parkhill in the back.

"God help me."

He saw Parkhill still running, then falling to lie safe.

Spender was being gathered in by a loose, running net of men. At the hilltop, behind two rocks, Spender lay, grinning with exhaustion from the thin atmosphere, great islands of sweat under each arm. The captain saw the two rocks. There was an interval between them of some four inches, giving free access to Spender's chest.

"Hey, you!" cried Parkhill. "Here's a slug for your head!"

Captain Wilder waited. Go on, Spender, he thought. Get out, like you said you would. You've only a few minutes to escape. Get out and come back later. Go on. You said you would. Go down in the tunnels you said you found, and lie there and live for months and years, reading your fine books and bathing in your temple pools. Go on, now, man, before it's too late.

Spender did not move from his position.

"What's wrong with him?" the captain asked himself.

The captain picked up his gun. He watched the running, hiding men. He looked at the towers of the little clean Martian village, like sharply carved chess pieces lying in the afternoon. He saw the rocks and the interval between where Spender's chest was revealed.

Parkhill was charging up, screaming in fury.

"No, Parkhill," said the captain. "I can't let you do it. Nor the others. No, none of you. Only me." He raised the gun and sighted it.

Will I be clean after this? he thought. Is it right that it's me who does it? Yes, it is. I know what I'm doing for what reason and it's right, because I think I'm the right person. I hope and pray I can live up to this.

He nodded his head at Spender. "Go on," he called in a loud whisper which no one heard. "I'll give you thirty seconds more to get away. Thirty seconds!"

The watch ticked on his wrist. The captain watched it tick. The men were running. Spender did not move. The watch ticked for a long time, very loudly in the captain's ears. "Go on, Spender, go on, get away!"

The thirty seconds were up.

The gun was sighted. The captain drew a deep breath. "Spender," he said, exhaling.

He pulled the trigger.

All that happened was that a faint powdering of rock went up in the sunlight. The echoes of the report faded.

The captain arose and called to his men: "He's dead."

The other men did not believe it. Their angles had prevented their seeing that particular fissure in the rocks. They saw their captain run up the hill, alone, and thought him either very brave or insane.

The men came after him a few minutes later.

They gathered around the body and someone said, "In the chest?"

The captain looked down. "In the chest," he said. He saw how the rocks had changed color under Spender. "I wonder why he waited. I wonder why he didn't escape as he planned. I wonder why he stayed on and got himself killed."

"Who knows?" someone said.

Spender lay there, his hands clasped, one around the gun, the other around the silver book that glittered in the sun.

Was it because of me? thought the captain. Was it because I refused to give in myself? Did Spender hate the idea of killing me? Am I any different from these others here? Is that what did it? Did he figure he could trust me? What other answer is there?

None. He squatted by the silent body.

I've got to live up to this, he thought. I can't let him down now. If he figured there was something in me that was like himself and couldn't kill me because of it, then what a job I have ahead of me! That's it, yes, that's it. I'm Spender all over again, but I think before I shoot. I don't shoot at all, I don't kill. I do things with people. And he couldn't kill me because I was himself under a slightly different condition.

The captain felt the sunlight on the back of his neck. He heard himself talking: "If only he had come to me and talked it over before he shot anybody, we could have worked it out somehow."

"Worked what out?" said Parkhill. "What could we have worked out with *his* likes?"

There was a singing of heat in the land, off the rocks and off the blue sky. "I guess you're right," said the captain. "We could never have got together. Spender and myself, perhaps. But Spender and you and the others, no, never. He's better off now. Let me have a drink from that canteen."

It was the captain who suggested the empty sarcophagus for Spender. They had found an ancient Martian tomb yard. They put Spender into a silver case with waxes and wines which were ten thousand years old, his hands folded on his chest. The last they saw of him was his peaceful face.

They stood for a moment in the ancient vault. "I think it would be a good idea for you to think of Spender from time to time," said the captain.

They walked from the vault and shut the marble door.

The next afternoon Parkhill did some target practice in one of the dead cities, shooting out the crystal windows and blowing the tops off the fragile towers. The captain caught Parkhill and knocked his teeth out.

AUGUST 2032:

THE SETTLERS

The men of Earth came to Mars.

They came because they were afraid or unafraid, because they were happy or unhappy, because they felt like Pilgrims or did not feel like Pilgrims. There was a reason for each man. They were leaving bad wives or bad jobs or bad towns; they were coming to find something or leave something or get something, to dig up something or bury something or leave something alone. They were coming with small dreams or large dreams or none at all. But a government finger pointed from four-color posters in many towns: THERE'S WORK FOR YOU IN THE SKY: SEE MARS! and the men shuffled forward, only a few at first, a double-score, for most men felt the great illness in them even before the rocket fired into space. And this disease was called The Loneliness, because when you saw your home town dwindle the size of your fist and then lemon-size and then pin-size and vanish in the fire-wake, you felt you had never been born, there was no town, you were nowhere, with space all around, nothing familiar, only other strange men. And when the state of Illinois, Iowa, Missouri, or Montana vanished into cloud seas, and, doubly, when the United States shrank to a misted island and the entire planet Earth became a muddy baseball tossed away, then you were alone, wandering in the meadows of space, on your way to a place you couldn't imagine.

So it was not unusual that the first men were few. The number grew steadily in proportion to the census of Earth Men already on Mars. There was comfort in numbers. But the first Lonely Ones had to stand by themselves....

DECEMBER 2032:

THE GREEN MORNING

When the sun set he crouched by the path and cooked a small supper and listened to the fire crack while he put the food in his mouth and chewed thoughtfully. It had been a day not unlike thirty others, with many neat holes dug in the dawn hours, seeds dropped in, and water brought from the bright canals. Now, with an iron weariness in his slight body, he lay and watched the sky color from one darkness to another.

His name was Benjamin Driscoll, and he was thirty-one years old. And the thing that he wanted was Mars grown green and tall with trees and foliage, producing air, more air, growing larger with each season; trees to cool the towns in the boiling summer, trees to hold back the winter winds. There were so many things a tree could do: add color, provide shade, drop fruit, or become a children's playground, a whole sky universe to climb and hang from; an architecture of food and pleasure, that was a tree. But most of all the trees would distill an icy air for the lungs, and a gentle rustling for the ear when you lay nights in your snowy bed and were gentled to sleep by the sound.

He lay listening to the dark earth gather itself, waiting for the sun, for the rains that hadn't come yet. His ear to the ground, he could hear the feet of the years ahead moving at a distance, and he imagined the seeds he had placed today sprouting up with green and taking hold on the sky, pushing out branch after branch, until Mars was an afternoon forest, Mars was a shining orchard.

In the early morning, with the small sun lifting faintly among the folded hills, he would be up and finished with a smoky breakfast in a few minutes and, trodding out the fire ashes, be on his way with knapsacks, testing, digging, placing seed or sprout, tamping lightly, watering, going on, whistling, looking at the clear sky brightening toward a warm noon.

"You need the air," he told his night fire. The fire was a ruddy, lively companion that snapped back at you, that slept close by with drowsy pink eyes warm through the chilly night. "We all need the air. It's a thin air here on Mars. You get tired so soon. It's like living in the Andes, in South America, high. You inhale and don't get anything. It doesn't satisfy."

He felt his rib case. In thirty days, how it had grown. To take in more air, they would all have to build their lungs. Or plant more trees.

"That's what I'm here for," he said. The fire popped. "In school they told a story about Johnny Appleseed walking across America planting apple trees. Well, I'm doing more. I'm planting oaks, elms, and maples, every kind of tree, aspens and deodars and

chestnuts. Instead of making just fruit for the stomach, I'm making air for the lungs. When those trees grow up some year, *think* of the oxygen they'll make!"

He remembered his arrival on Mars. Like a thousand others, he had gazed out upon a still morning and thought, How do I fit here? What will I do? Is there a job for me?

Then he had fainted.

Someone pushed a vial of ammonia to his nose and, coughing, he came around.

"You'll be all right," said the doctor.

"What happened?"

"The air's pretty thin. Some can't take it. I think you'll have to go back to Earth."

"No!" He sat up and almost immediately felt his eyes darken and Mars revolve twice around under him. His nostrils dilated and he forced his lungs to drink in deep nothingnesses. "I'll be all right. I've got to stay here!"

They let him lie gasping in horrid fishlike motions. And he thought, Air, air, air. They're sending me back because of air. And he turned his head to look across the Martian fields and hills. He brought them to focus, and the first thing he noticed was that there were no trees, no trees at all, as far as you could look in any direction. The land was down upon itself, a land of black loam, but nothing on it, not even grass. Air, he thought, the thin stuff whistling in his nostrils. Air, air. And on top of hills, or in their shadows, or even by little creeks, not a tree and not a single green blade of grass. Of course! He felt the answer came not from his mind, but his lungs and his throat. And the thought was like a sudden gust of pure oxygen, raising him up. Trees and grass. He looked down at his hands and turned them over. He would plant trees and grass. That would be his job, to fight against the very thing that might prevent his staying here. He would have a private horticultural war with Mars. There lay the old soil, and the plants of it so ancient they had worn themselves out. But what if new forms were introduced? Earth trees, great mimosas and weeping willows and magnolias and magnificent eucalyptus. What then? There was no guessing what mineral wealth hid in the soil, untapped because the old ferns, flowers, bushes, and trees had tired themselves to death.

"Let me up!" he shouted. "I've got to see the Co-ordinator!"

He and the Co-ordinator had talked an entire morning about things that grew and were green. It would be months, if not years, before organized planting began. So far, frosted food was brought from Earth in flying icicles; a few community gardens were greening up in hydroponic plants.

"Meanwhile," said the Co-ordinator, "it's your job. We'll get what seed we can for you, a little equipment. Space on the rockets is mighty precious now. I'm afraid, since these first towns are mining communities, there won't be much sympathy for your tree planting—"

"But you'll let me do it?"

They let him do it. Provided with a single motorcycle, its bin full of rich seeds and sprouts, he had parked his vehicle in the valley wilderness and struck out on foot over the land.

That had been thirty days ago, and he had never glanced back. For looking back would have been sickening to the heart. The weather was excessively dry; it was

doubtful if any seeds had sprouted yet. Perhaps his entire campaign, his four weeks of bending and scooping were lost. He kept his eyes only ahead of him, going on down this wide shallow valley under the sun, away from First Town, waiting for the rains to come.

Clouds were gathering over the dry mountains now as he drew his blanket over his shoulders. Mars was a place as unpredictable as time. He felt the baked hills simmering down into frosty night, and he thought of the rich, inky soil, a soil so black and shiny it almost crawled and stirred in your fist, a rank soil from which might sprout gigantic beanstalks from which, with bone-shaking concussion, might drop screaming giants.

The fire fluttered into sleepy ash. The air tremored to the distant roll of a cartwheel. Thunder. A sudden odor of water. Tonight, he thought, and put his hand out to feel for rain. Tonight.

He awoke to a tap on his brow.

Water ran down his nose into his lips. Another drop hit his eye, blurring it. Another splashed his chin.

The rain.

Raw, gentle, and easy, it mizzled out of the high air, a special elixir, tasting of spells and stars and air, carrying a peppery dust in it, and moving like a rare light sherry on his tongue.

Rain.

He sat up. He let the blanket fall and his blue denim shirt spot, while the rain took on more solid drops. The fire looked as though an invisible animal were dancing on it, crushing it, until it was angry smoke. The rain fell. The great black lid of sky cracked in six powdery blue chips, like a marvelous crackled glaze, and rushed down. He saw ten billion rain crystals, hesitating long enough to be photographed by the electrical display. Then darkness and water.

He was drenched to the skin, but he held his face up and let the water hit his eyelids, laughing. He clapped his hands together and stepped up and walked around his little camp, and it was one o'clock in the morning.

It rained steadily for two hours and then stopped. The stars came out, freshly washed and clearer than ever.

Changing into dry clothes from his cellophane pack, Mr. Benjamin Driscoll lay down and went happily to sleep.

The sun rose slowly among the hills. It broke out upon the land quietly and wakened Mr. Driscoll where he lay.

He waited a moment before arising. He had worked and waited a long hot month, and now, standing up, he turned at last and faced the direction from which he had come.

It was a green morning.

As far as he could see the trees were standing up against the sky. Not one tree, not two, not a dozen, but the thousands he had planted in seed and sprout. And not little trees, no, not saplings, not little tender shoots, but great trees, huge trees, trees as tall as ten men, green and green and huge and round and full, trees shimmering their metallic leaves, trees whispering, trees in a line over hills, lemon trees, lime trees, redwoods and mimosas and oaks and elms and aspens, cherry, maple, ash, apple, orange, eucalyptus, stung by a tumultuous rain, nourished by alien and magical soil and, even as he watched, throwing out new branches, popping open new buds.

"Impossible!" cried Mr. Benjamin Driscoll.

But the valley and the morning were green.

And the air!

All about, like a moving current, a mountain river, came the new air, the oxygen blowing from the green trees. You could see it shimmer high in crystal billows. Oxygen, fresh, pure, green, cold oxygen turning the valley into a river delta. In a moment the town doors would flip wide, people would run out through the new miracle of oxygen, sniffing, gusting in lungfuls of it, cheeks pinking with it, noses frozen with it, lungs revivified, hearts leaping, and worn bodies lifted into a dance.

Mr. Benjamin Driscoll took one long deep drink of green water air and fainted.

Before he woke again five thousand new trees had climbed up into the yellow sun.

FEBRUARY 2033:

THE LOCUSTS

The rockets set the bony meadows afire, turned rock to lava, turned wood to charcoal, transmuted water to steam, made sand and silica into green glass which lay like shattered mirrors reflecting the invasion, all about. The rockets came like drums, beating in the night. The rockets came like locusts, swarming and settling in blooms of rosy smoke. And from the rockets ran men with hammers in their hands to beat the strange world into a shape that was familiar to the eye, to bludgeon away all the strangeness, their mouths fringed with nails so they resembled steel-toothed carnivores, spitting them into their swift hands as they hammered up frame cottages and scuttled over roofs with shingles to blot out the eerie stars, and fit green shades to pull against the night. And when the carpenters had hurried on, the women came in with flowerpots and chintz and pans and set up a kitchen clamor to cover the silence that Mars made waiting outside the door and the shaded window.

In six months a dozen small towns had been laid down upon the naked planet, filled with sizzling neon tubes and yellow electric bulbs. In all, some ninety thousand people came to Mars, and more, on Earth, were packing their grips....

AUGUST 2033:

NIGHT MEETING

Before going on up into the blue hills, Tomás Gómez stopped for gasoline at the lonely station.

"Kind of alone out here, aren't you, Pop?" said Tomás.

The old man wiped off the windshield of the small truck. "Not bad."

"How do you like Mars, Pop?"

"Fine. Always something new. I made up my mind when I came here last year I wouldn't expect nothing, nor ask nothing, nor be surprised at nothing. We've got to forget Earth and how things were. We've got to look at what we're in here, and how *different* it is. I get a hell of a lot of fun out of just the weather here. It's *Martian* weather. Hot as hell daytimes, cold as hell nights. I get a big kick out of the different flowers and different rain. I came to Mars to retire and I wanted to retire in a place where everything is different. An old man needs to have things different. Young people don't want to talk to him, other old people bore hell out of him. So I thought the best thing for me is a place so different that all you got to do is open your eyes and you're entertained. I got this gas station. If business picks up too much, I'll move on back to some other old highway that's not so busy, where I can earn just enough to live on and still have time to feel the *different* things here."

"You got the right idea, Pop," said Tomás, his brown hands idly on the wheel. He was feeling good. He had been working in one of the new colonies for ten days straight and now he had two days off and was on his way to a party.

"I'm not surprised at anything any more," said the old man. "I'm just looking. I'm just experiencing. If you can't take Mars for what she is, you might as well go back to Earth. Everything's crazy up here, the soil, the air, the canals, the natives (I never saw any yet, but I hear they're around), the clocks. Even my clock acts funny. Even *time* is crazy up here. Sometimes I feel I'm here all by myself, no one else on the whole damn planet. I'd take bets on it. Sometimes I feel about eight years old, my body squeezed up and everything else tall. Jesus, it's just the place for an old man. Keeps me alert and keeps me happy. You know what Mars is? It's like a thing I got for Christmas seventy years ago—don't know if you ever had one—they called them kaleidoscopes, bits of crystal and cloth and beads and pretty junk. You held it up to the sunlight and looked in through at it, and it took your breath away. All the patterns! Well, that's Mars. Enjoy it. Don't ask it to be nothing else but what it is. Jesus, you know that highway right there, built by the Martians, is over sixteen

centuries old and still in good condition? That's one dollar and fifty cents, thanks and good night."

Tomás drove off down the ancient highway, laughing quietly.

It was a long road going into darkness and hills and he held to the wheel, now and again reaching into his lunch bucket and taking out a piece of candy. He had been driving steadily for an hour, with no other car on the road, no light, just the road going under, the hum, the roar, and Mars out there, so quiet. Mars was always quiet, but quieter tonight than any other. The deserts and empty seas swung by him, and the mountains against the stars.

There was a smell of Time in the air tonight. He smiled and turned the fancy in his mind. There was a thought. What did Time smell like? Like dust and clocks and people. And if you wondered what Time sounded like it sounded like water running in a dark cave and voices crying and dirt dropping down upon hollow box lids, and rain. And, going further, what did Time look like? Time looked like snow dropping silently into a black room or it looked like a silent film in an ancient theater, one hundred billion faces falling like those New Year balloons, down and down into nothing. That was how Time smelled and looked and sounded. And tonight—Tomás shoved a hand into the wind outside the truck—tonight you could almost *touch* Time.

He drove the truck between hills of Time. His neck prickled and he sat up, watching ahead.

He pulled into a little dead Martian town, stopped the engine, and let the silence come in around him. He sat, not breathing, looking out at the white buildings in the moonlight. Uninhabited for centuries. Perfect, faultless, in ruins, yes, but perfect, nevertheless.

He started the engine and drove on another mile or more before stopping again, climbing out, carrying his lunch bucket, and walking to a little promontory where he could look back at that dusty city. He opened his thermos and poured himself a cup of coffee. A night bird flew by. He felt very good, very much at peace.

Perhaps five minutes later there was a sound. Off in the hills, where the ancient highway curved, there was a motion, a dim light, and then a murmur.

Tomás turned slowly with the coffee cup in his hand.

And out of the hills came a strange thing.

It was a machine like a jade-green insect, a praying mantis, delicately rushing through the cold air, indistinct, countless green diamonds winking over its body, and red jewels that glittered with multifaceted eyes. Its six legs fell upon the ancient highway with the sounds of a sparse rain which dwindled away, and from the back of the machine a Martian with melted gold for eyes looked down at Tomás as if he were looking into a well.

Tomás raised his hand and thought Hello! automatically but did not move his lips, for this was a Martian. But Tomás had swum in blue rivers on Earth, with strangers passing on the road, and eaten in strange houses with strange people, and his weapon

had always been his smile. He did not carry a gun. And he did not feel the need of one now, even with the little fear that gathered about his heart at this moment.

The Martian's hands were empty too. For a moment they looked across the cool air at each other.

It was Tomás who moved first.

"Hello!" he called.

"Hello!" called the Martian in his own language.

They did not understand each other.

"Did you say hello?" they both asked.

"What did you say?" they said, each in a different tongue.

They scowled.

"Who are you?" said Tomás in English.

"What are you doing here?" In Martian; the stranger's lips moved.

"Where are you going?" they said, and looked bewildered.

"I'm Tomás Gomez."

"I'm Muhe Ca."

Neither understood, but they tapped their chests with the words and then it became clear.

And then the Martian laughed. "Wait!" Tomás felt his head touched, but no hand had touched him. "There!" said the Martian in English. "That is better!"

"You learned my language, so quick!"

"Nothing at all!"

They looked, embarrassed with a new silence, at the steaming coffee he had in one hand.

"Something different?" said the Martian, eying him and the coffee, referring to them both, perhaps.

"May I offer you a drink?" said Tomás.

"Please."

The Martian slid down from his machine.

A second cup was produced and filled, steaming. Tomas held it out.

Their hands met and—like mist—fell through each other.

"Jesus Christ!" cried Tomás, and dropped the cup.

"Name of the Gods!" said the Martian in his own tongue.

"Did you see what happened?" they both whispered.

They were very cold and terrified.

The Martian bent to touch the cup but could not touch it.

"Jesus!" said Tomás.

"Indeed." The Martian tried again and again to get hold of the cup, but could not. He stood up and thought for a moment, then took a knife from his belt. "Hey!" cried Tomás. "You misunderstand, catch!" said the Martian, and tossed it. Tomás cupped his hands. The knife fell through his flesh. It hit the ground. Tomás bent to pick it up but could not touch it, and he recoiled, shivering.

Now he looked at the Martian against the sky.

"The stars!" he said.

"The stars!" said the Martian, looking, in turn, at Tomás.

The stars were white and sharp beyond the flesh of the Martian, and they were sewn into his flesh like scintillas swallowed into the thin, phosphorescent membrane of a gelatinous sea fish. You could see stars flickering like violet eyes in the Martian's stomach and chest, and through his wrists, like jewelry.

"I can see through you!" said Tomás.

"And I through you!" said the Martian, stepping back.

Tomás felt of his own body and, feeling the warmth, was reassured. *I* am real, he thought.

The Martian touched his own nose and lips. "*I* have flesh," he said, half aloud. "*I* am alive."

Tomás stared at the stranger. "And if *I* am real, then *you* must be dead."

"No, you!"

"A ghost!"

"A phantom!"

They pointed at each other, with starlight burning in their limbs like daggers and icicles and fireflies, and then fell to judging their limbs again, each finding himself intact, hot, excited, stunned, awed, and the other, ah yes, that other over there, unreal, a ghostly prism flashing the accumulated light of distant worlds.

I'm drunk, thought Tomas. I won't tell anyone of this tomorrow, no, no.

They stood there on the ancient highway, neither of them moving.

"Where are you from?" asked the Martian at last.

"Earth."

"What is that?"

"There." Tomás nodded to the sky.

"When?"

"We landed over a year ago, remember?"

"No."

"And all of you were dead, all but a few. You're rare, don't you *know* that?"

"That's not true."

"Yes, dead. I saw the bodies. Black, in the rooms, in the houses, dead. Thousands of them."

"That's ridiculous. We're *alive*!"

"Mister, you're invaded, only you don't know it. You must have escaped."

"I haven't escaped; there was nothing to escape. What do you mean? I'm on my way to a festival now at the canal, near the Eniall Mountains. I was there last night. Don't you see the city there?" The Martian pointed.

Tomás looked and saw the ruins. "Why, that city's been dead thousands of years."

The Martian laughed. "Dead. I slept there yesterday!"

"And I was in it a week ago and the week before that, and I just drove through it now, and it's a heap. See the broken pillars?"

"Broken? Why, I see them perfectly. The moonlight helps. And the pillars are upright."

"There's dust in the streets," said Tomás.

"The streets are clean!"

"The canals are empty right there."

"The canals are full of lavender wine!"

"It's dead."

"It's alive!" protested the Martian, laughing more now. "Oh, you're quite wrong. See all the carnival lights? There are beautiful boats as slim as women, beautiful women as slim as boats, women the color of sand, women with fire flowers in their hands. I can see them, small, running in the streets there. That's where I'm going now, to the festival; we'll float on the waters all night long; we'll sing, we'll drink, we'll make love. Can't you see it?"

"Mister, that city is dead as a dried lizard. Ask any of our party. Me, I'm on my way to Green City tonight; that's the new colony we just raised over near Illinois Highway. You're mixed up. We brought in a million board feet of Oregon lumber and a couple dozen tons of good steel nails and hammered together two of the nicest little villages you ever saw. Tonight we're warming one of them. A couple rockets are coming in from Earth, bringing our wives and girl friends. There'll be barn dances and whisky—"

The Martian was now disquieted. "You say it is over *that* way?"

"There are the rockets." Tomás walked him to the edge of the hill and pointed down. "See?"

"No."

"Damn it, there they *are*! Those long silver things."

"No."

Now Tomás laughed. "You're blind!"

"I see very well. You are the one who does not see."

"But you see the new *town*, don't you?"

"I see nothing but an ocean, and water at low tide."

"Mister, that water's been evaporated for forty centuries."

"Ah, now, now, that is enough."

"It's true, I tell you."

The Martian grew very serious. "Tell me again. You do not see the city the way I describe it? The pillars very white, the boats very slender, the festival lights—oh, I see them *clearly*! And listen! I can hear them singing. It's no space away at all."

Tomás listened and shook his head. "No."

"And I, on the other hand," said the Martian, "cannot see what you describe. Well."

Again they were cold. An ice was in their flesh.

"Can it be...?"

"What?"

"You say 'from the sky'?"

"Earth."

"Earth, a name, nothing," said the Martian. "*But*...as I came up the pass an hour ago..." He touched the back of his neck. "I felt..."

"Cold?"

"Yes."

"And now?"

"Cold again. Oddly. There was a thing to the light, to the hills, the road," said the Martian. "I felt the strangeness, the road, the light, and for a moment I felt as if I were the last man alive on this world..."

"So did I!" said Tomás, and it was like talking to an old and dear friend, confiding, growing warm with the topic.

The Martian closed his eyes and opened them again. "This can only mean one thing. It has to do with Time. Yes. You are a figment of the Past!"

"No, you are from the Past," said the Earth Man, having had time to think of it now.

"You are so *certain*. How can you prove who is from the Past, who from the Future? What year is it?"

"Two thousand thirty-three!"

"What does that mean to *me*?"

Tomás considered and shrugged. "Nothing."

"It is as if I told you that it is the year 4462853 S.E.C. It is nothing and more than nothing! Where is the clock to show us how the stars stand?"

"But the ruins prove it! They prove that *I* am the Future, *I* am alive, *you* are dead!"

"Everything in me denies this. My heart beats, my stomach hungers, my mouth thirsts. No, no, not dead, not alive, either of us. More alive than anything else. Caught between is more like it. Two strangers passing in the night, that is it. Two strangers passing. Ruins, you say?"

"Yes. You're afraid?"

"Who wants to see the Future, who ever does? A man can face the Past, but to think—the pillars *crumbled*, you say? And the sea empty, and the canals dry, and the maidens dead, and the flowers withered?" The Martian was silent, but then he looked on ahead. "But there they are. I see them. Isn't that enough for me? They wait for me now, no matter *what* you say."

And for Tomás the rockets, far away, waiting for *him*, and the town and the women from Earth. "We can never agree," he said.

"Let us agree to disagree," said the Martian. "What does it matter who is Past or Future, if we are both alive, for what follows will follow, tomorrow or in ten thousand years. How do you know that those temples are not the temples of your own civilization one hundred centuries from now, tumbled and broken? You do not know. Then don't ask. But the night is very short. There go the festival fires in the sky, and the birds."

Tomas put out his hand. The Martian did likewise in imitation.

Their hands did not touch; they melted through each other.

"Will we meet again?"

"Who knows? Perhaps some other night."

"I'd like to go with you to that festival."

"And I wish I might come to your new town, to see this ship you speak of, to see these men, to hear all that has happened."

"Good-by," said Tomás.

"Good night."

The Martian rode his green metal vehicle quietly away into the hills. The Earth Man turned his truck and drove it silently in the opposite direction.

"Good lord, what a dream that was," sighed Tomás, his hands on the wheel, thinking of the rockets, the women, the raw whisky, the Virginia reels, the party.

How strange a vision was that, thought the Martian, rushing on, thinking of the festival, the canals, the boats, the women with golden eyes, and the songs.

The night was dark. The moons had gone down. Starlight twinkled on the empty highway where now there was not a sound, no car, no person, nothing. And it remained that way all the rest of the cool dark night.

OCTOBER 2033:

THE SHORE

Mars was a distant shore, and the men spread upon it in waves. Each wave different, and each wave stronger. The first wave carried with it men accustomed to spaces and coldness and being alone, the coyote and cattlemen, with no fat on them, with faces the years had worn the flesh off, with eyes like nailheads, and hands like the material of old gloves, ready to touch anything. Mars could do nothing to them, for they were bred to plains and prairies as open as the Martian fields. They came and made things a little less empty, so that others would find courage to follow. They put panes in hollow windows and lights behind the panes.

They were the first men.

Everyone knew who the first women would be.

The second men should have traveled from other countries with other accents and other ideas. But the rockets were American and the men were American and it stayed that way, while Europe and Asia and South America and Australia and the islands watched the Roman candles leave them behind. The rest of the world was buried in war or the thoughts of war.

So the second men were Americans also. And they came from the cabbage tenements and subways, and they found much rest and vacation in the company of the silent men from the tumbleweed states who knew how to use silences so they filled you up with peace after long years crushed in tubes, tins, and boxes in New York.

And among the second men were men who looked, by their eyes, as if they were on their way to God....

NOVEMBER 2033:

THE FIRE BALLOONS

Fire exploded over summer night lawns. You saw sparkling faces of uncles and aunts. Skyrockets fell up in the brown shining eyes of cousins on the porch, and the cold charred sticks thumped down in dry meadows far away.

The Most Reverend Father Joseph Daniel Peregrine opened his eyes. What a dream: he and his cousins with their fiery play at his grandfather's ancient Ohio home so many years ago!

He lay listening to the great hollow of the church, the other cells where other Fathers lay. Had they, too, on the eve of the flight of the rocket *Crucifix*, lain with memories of the Fourth of July? Yes. This was like those breathless Independence dawns when you waited for the first concussion and rushed out on the dewy sidewalks, your hands full of loud miracles.

So here they were, the Episcopal Fathers, in the breathing dawn before they pinwheeled off to Mars, leaving their incense through the velvet cathedral of space.

"Should we go at all?" whispered Father Peregrine. "Shouldn't we solve our own sins on Earth? Aren't we running from our lives here?"

He arose, his fleshy body, with its rich look of strawberries, milk, and steak, moving heavily.

"Or is it sloth?" he wondered. "Do I dread the journey?"

He stepped into the needle-spray shower.

"But I shall take you to Mars, body." He addressed himself. "Leaving old sins here. And on to Mars to find new sins?" A delightful thought, almost. Sins no one had ever thought of. Oh, he himself had written a little book: *The Problem of Sin on Other Worlds*, ignored as somehow not serious enough by his Episcopal brethren.

Only last night, over a final cigar, he and Father Stone had talked of it.

"On Mars sin might appear as virtue. We must guard against virtuous acts there that, later, might be found to be sins!" said Father Peregrine, beaming. "How exciting! It's been centuries since so much adventure has accompanied the prospect of being a missionary!"

"*I* will recognize sin," said Father Stone bluntly, "*even* on Mars."

"Oh, we priests pride ourselves on being litmus paper, changing color in sin's presence," retorted Father Peregrine, "but what if Martian chemistry is such we do not color *at all*! If there are new senses on Mars, you must admit the possibility of unrecognizable sin."

"If there is no malice aforethought, there is no sin or punishment for same—the Lord assures us that," Father Stone replied.

"On Earth, yes. But perhaps a Martian sin might inform the subconscious of its evil, telepathically, leaving the conscious mind of man free to act, seemingly without malice! What *then*?"

"What *could* there be in the way of new sins?"

Father Peregrine leaned heavily forward. "Adam *alone* did not sin. Add Eve and you add temptation. Add a second man and you make adultery possible. With the addition of sex or people, you add sin. If men were harmless, they could not strangle with their hands. You would not have that particular sin of murder. Add arms, and you add the possibility of a new violence. Amoebas cannot sin because they reproduce by fission. They do not covet wives or murder each other. Add sex to amoebas, add arms and legs, and you would have murder and adultery. Add an arm or leg or person, or take away each, and you add or subtract possible evil. On Mars, what if there are five new senses, organs, invisible limbs we can't conceive of—then mightn't there be five new *sins*?"

Father Stone gasped. "I think you *enjoy* this sort of thing!"

"I keep my mind alive, Father; just alive, is all."

"Your mind's always juggling, isn't it?—mirrors, torches, plates."

"Yes. Because sometimes the Church seems like those posed circus tableaux where the curtain lifts and men, white, zinc-oxide, talcum-powder statues, freeze to represent abstract Beauty. Very wonderful. But I hope there will always be room for me to dart about among the statues, don't you, Father Stone?"

Father Stone had moved away. "I think we'd better go to bed. In a few hours we'll be jumping up to see your *new* sins, Father Peregrine."

The rocket stood ready for the firing.

The Fathers walked from their devotions in the chilly morning, many a fine priest from New York or Chicago or Los Angeles—the Church was sending its best—walking across town to the frosty field. Walking, Father Peregrine remembered the Bishop's words:

"Father Peregrine, you will captain the missionaries, with Father Stone at your side. Having chosen you for this serious task, I find my reasons deplorably obscure, Father, but your pamphlet on planetary sin did not go unread. You are a flexible man. And Mars is like that uncleaned closet we have neglected for millenniums. Sin has collected there like bric-a-brac. Mars is twice Earth's age and has had double the number of Saturday nights, liquor baths, and eye poppings at women as naked as white seals. When we open that closet door, things will fall on us. We need a quick, flexible man—one whose mind can dodge. Anyone a little dogmatic might break in two. I feel you'll be resilient. Father, the job is yours."

The Bishop and the Fathers knelt.

The blessing was said and the rocket given a little shower of holy water. Arising, the Bishop addressed them:

"I know you will go with God, to prepare the Martians for the reception of His Truth. I wish you all a *thoughtful* journey."

They filed past the Bishop, twenty men, robes whispering, to deliver their hands into his kind hands before passing into the cleansed projectile.

"I wonder," said Father Peregrine, at the last moment, "if Mars is hell? Only waiting for our arrival before it bursts into brimstone and fire."

"Lord, be with us," said Father Stone.

The rocket moved.

Coming out of space was like coming out of the most beautiful cathedral they had ever seen. Touching Mars was like touching the ordinary pavement outside the church five minutes after having *really* known your love for God.

The Fathers stepped gingerly from the steaming rocket and knelt upon Martian sand while Father Peregrine gave thanks.

"Lord, we thank Thee for the journey through Thy rooms. And, Lord, we have reached a new land, so we must have new eyes. We shall hear new sounds, and must needs have new ears. And there will be new sins, for which we ask the gift of better and firmer and purer hearts. Amen."

They arose.

And here was Mars like a sea under which they trudged in the guise of submarine biologists, seeking life. Here the territory of hidden sin. Oh, how carefully they must all balance, like gray feathers, in this new element, afraid that walking *itself* might be sinful, or breathing, or simple fasting!

And here was the mayor of First Town come to meet them with outstretched hand. "What can I do for you, Father Peregrine?"

"We'd like to know about the Martians. For only if we know about them can we plan our church intelligently. Are they ten feet tall? We will build large doors. Are their skins blue or red or green? We must know when we put human figures in the stained glass so we may use the right skin color. Are they heavy? We will build sturdy seats for them."

"Father," said the mayor, "I don't think you should worry about the Martians. There are two races. One of them is pretty well dead. A few are in hiding. And the second race—well, they're not quite human."

"Oh?" Father Peregrine's heart quickened.

"They're round luminous globes of light, Father, living in those hills. Man or beast, who can say? But they act intelligently, I hear." The mayor shrugged. "Of course, they're not men, so I don't think you'll care—"

"On the contrary," said Father Peregrine swiftly. "Intelligent, you say?"

"There's a story. A prospector broke his leg in those hills and would have died there. The blue spheres of light came at him. When he woke, he was down on a highway and didn't know how he got there."

"Drunk," said Father Stone.

"That's the story," said the mayor. "Father Peregrine, with most of the Martians dead, and only these blue spheres, I frankly think you'd be better off in First City. Mars is opening up. It's a frontier now, like in the old days on Earth, out West and in Alaska. Men are pouring up there. There're a couple thousand black Irish mechanics and miners and day laborers in First Town who need saving, because there're too many wicked women came with them, and too much ten-century-old Martian wine—"

Father Peregrine was gazing into the soft blue hills.

Father Stone cleared his throat. "Well, Father?"

Father Peregrine did not hear. "Spheres of blue *fire*?"

"Yes, Father."

"Ah," Father Peregrine sighed.

"Blue balloons." Father Stone shook his head. "A circus!"

Father Peregrine felt his wrists pounding. He saw the little frontier town with raw, fresh-built sin, and he saw the hills, old with the oldest and yet perhaps an even newer (to him) sin.

"Mayor, could your black Irish laborers cook one more day in hellfire?"

"I'd turn and baste them for you, Father."

Father Peregrine nodded to the hills. "Then that's where we'll go."

There was a murmur from everyone.

"It would be so simple," explained Father Peregrine, "to go into town. I prefer to think that if the Lord walked here and people said, 'Here is the beaten path,' He would reply, 'Show me the weeds. I will *make* a path.'"

"But—"

"Father Stone, think how it would weigh upon us if we passed sinners by and did not extend our hands."

"But globes of fire!"

"I imagine man looked funny to other animals when we first appeared. Yet he has a soul, for all his homeliness. Until we prove otherwise, let us assume that these fiery spheres have souls."

"All right," agreed the mayor, "but you'll be back to town."

"We'll see. First, some breakfast. Then you and I, Father Stone, will walk alone into the hills. I don't want to frighten those fiery Martians with machines or crowds. Shall we have breakfast?"

The Fathers ate in silence.

At nightfall Father Peregrine and Father Stone were high in the hills. They stopped and sat upon a rock to enjoy a moment of relaxation and waiting. The Martians had not as yet appeared, and they both felt vaguely disappointed.

"I wonder—" Father Peregrine mopped his face. "Do you think if we called 'Hello!' they might answer?"

"Father Peregrine, won't you ever be serious?"

"Not until the good Lord is. Oh, don't look so terribly shocked, please. The Lord is not serious. In fact, it is a little hard to know just what else He is except loving. And love has to do with humor, doesn't it? For you cannot love someone unless you put up with him, can you? And you cannot put up with someone constantly unless you can laugh at him. Isn't that true? And certainly we are ridiculous little animals wallowing in the fudge bowl, and God must love us all the more because we appeal to his humor."

"*I* never thought of God as humorous," said Father Stone.

"The Creator of the platypus, the camel, the ostrich, and man? Oh, come now!" Father Peregrine laughed.

But at this instant, from among the twilight hills, like a series of blue lamps lit to guide their way, came the Martians.

Father Stone saw them first. "Look!"

Father Peregrine turned, and the laughter stopped in his mouth.

The round blue globes of fire hovered among the twinkling stars, distantly trembling.

"Monsters!" Father Stone leaped up.

But Father Peregrine caught him. "Wait!"

"We should've gone to town!"

"No, listen, look!" pleaded Father Peregrine.

"I'm afraid!"

"Don't be. This is God's work!"

"The devil's!"

"No, now, quiet!" Father Peregrine gentled him and they crouched with the soft blue light on their upturned faces as the fiery orbs drew near.

And again, Independence Night, thought Father Peregrine, tremoring. He felt like a child back in those July Fourth evenings, the sky blowing apart, breaking into powdery stars and burning sound, the concussions jingling house windows like the ice on a thousand thin ponds. The aunts, uncles, cousins crying, "Ah!" as to some celestial physician. The summer sky colors. And the Fire Balloons, lit by an indulgent grandfather, steadied in his massively tender hands. Oh, the memory of those lovely Fire Balloons, softly lighted, warmly billowed bits of tissue, like insect wings, lying like folded wasps in boxes, and last of all, after the day of riot and fury, at long last from their boxes, delicately unfolded, blue, red, white, patriotic—the Fire Balloons! He saw the dim faces of dear relatives long dead and mantled with moss as Grandfather lit the tiny candle and let the warm air breathe up to form the balloon plumply luminous in his hands, a shining vision which they held, reluctant to let it go; for, once released, it was yet another year gone from life, another Fourth, another bit of Beauty vanished. And then up, up, still up through the warm summer night constellations, the Fire Balloons had drifted, while red-white-and-blue eyes followed them, wordless, from family porches. Away into deep Illinois country, over night rivers and sleeping mansions, the Fire Balloons dwindled, forever gone....

Father Peregrine felt tears in his eyes. Above him the Martians, not one but a *thousand* whispering Fire Balloons, it seemed, hovered. Any moment he might find his long-dead and blessed grandfather at his elbow, staring up at Beauty.

But it was Father Stone.

"Let's go, please, Father!"

"I must speak to them." Father Peregrine rustled forward, not knowing what to say, for what had he ever said to the Fire Balloons of time past except with his mind: *You are beautiful, you are beautiful*, and that was not enough now. He could only lift his heavy arms and call upward, as he had often wished to call after the enchanted Fire Balloons, "Hello!"

But the fiery spheres only burned like images in a dark mirror. They seemed fixed, gaseous, miraculous, forever.

"We come with God," said Father Peregrine to the sky.

"Silly, silly, silly." Father Stone chewed the back of his hand. "In the name of God, Father Peregrine, stop!"

But now the phosphorescent spheres blew away into the hills. In a moment they were gone.

Father Peregrine called again, and the echo of his last cry shook the hills above. Turning, he saw an avalanche shake out dust, pause, and then, with a thunder of stone wheels, crash down the mountain upon them.

"Look what you've done!" cried Father Stone.

Father Peregrine was almost fascinated, then horrified. He turned, knowing they could run only a few feet before the rocks crushed them into ruins. He had time to whisper, "*Oh, Lord!*" and the rocks fell!

"Father!"

They were separated like chaff from wheat. There was a blue shimmering of globes, a shift of cold stars, a roar, and then they stood upon a ledge two hundred feet away watching the spot where their bodies would have been buried under tons of stone.

The blue light evaporated.

The two Fathers clutched each other. "What happened?"

"The blue fires lifted us!"

"We ran, *that* was it!"

"No, the globes saved us."

"They couldn't!"

"They *did*."

The sky was empty. There was a feel as if a great bell had just stopped tolling. Reverberations lingered in their teeth and marrows.

"Let's get away from here. You'll have us killed."

"I haven't feared death for a good many years, Father Stone."

"We've proved nothing. Those blue lights ran off at the first cry. It's useless."

"No." Father Peregrine was suffused with a stubborn wonder. "Somehow, they saved us. That proves they have souls."

"It proves only that they *might* have saved us. Everything was confused. We might have escaped, ourselves."

"They are not animals, Father Stone. Animals do not save lives, especially of strangers. There is mercy and compassion here. Perhaps, tomorrow, we may prove more."

"Prove what? How?" Father Stone was immensely tired now; the outrage to his mind and body showed on his stiff face. "Follow them in helicopters, reading chapter and verse? They're not human. They haven't eyes or ears or bodies like ours."

"But I feel something about them," replied Father Peregrine. "I know a great revelation is at hand. They saved us. They *think*. They had a choice; let us live or die. That proves free will!"

Father Stone set to work building a fire, glaring at the sticks in his hands, choking on the gray smoke. "I myself will open a convent for nursling geese, a monastery for sainted swine, and I shall build a miniature apse in a microscope so that paramecium can attend services and tell their beads with their flagella."

"Oh, Father Stone."

"I'm sorry." Father Stone blinked redly across the fire. "But this is like blessing a crocodile before he chews you up. You're risking the entire missionary expedition. We belong in First Town, washing liquor from men's throats and perfume off their hands!"

"Can't you recognize the human in the inhuman?"

"I'd much rather recognize the inhuman in the human."

"But if I prove these things sin, know sin, know a moral life, have free will and intellect, Father Stone?"

"That will take much convincing."

The night grew rapidly cold and they peered into the fire to find their wildest thoughts, while eating biscuits and berries, and soon they were bundled for sleep under the chiming stars. And just before turning over one last time, Father Stone, who had been thinking for many minutes to find something to bother Father Peregrine about, stared into the soft pink charcoal bed and said, "Not Adam and Eve on Mars. No Original Sin. Maybe the Martians live in a state of God's grace. Then we can go back down to town and start work on the Earth Men."

Father Peregrine reminded himself to say a little prayer for Father Stone, who got so mad and who was now being vindictive, God help him. "Yes, Father Stone, but the Martians killed some of our settlers. That's sinful. There must have been an Original Sin and a Martian Adam and Eve. We'll find them. Men are men, unfortunately, no matter what their shape, and inclined to sin."

But Father Stone was pretending sleep.

Father Peregrine did not shut his eyes.

Of course they couldn't let these Martians go to hell, could they? With a compromise to their consciences, could they go back to the new colonial towns, those towns so full of sinful gullets and women with scintilla eyes and white oyster bodies rollicking in beds and with lonely laborers? Wasn't that the place for the Fathers? Wasn't this trek into the hills merely a personal whim? Was he really thinking of God's Church, or was he quenching the thirst of a spongelike curiosity? Those blue round globes of St. Anthony's fire—how they burned in his mind! What a challenge, to find the man behind the mask, the human behind the inhuman. Wouldn't he be proud if he could say, even to his secret self, that he had converted a rolling huge pool table full of fiery spheres! What a sin of pride! Worth doing penance for! But then one did

many prideful things out of Love, and he loved the Lord so much and was so happy at it that he wanted everyone else to be happy too.

The last thing he saw before sleep was the return of the blue fires, like a flight of burning angels silently singing him to his worried rest.

The blue round dreams were still there in the sky when Father Peregrine awoke in the early morning.

Father Stone slept like a stiff bundle, quietly. Father Peregrine watched the Martians floating and watching him. They were human—he *knew* it. But he must prove it or face a dry-mouthed, *dry-eyed* Bishop telling him kindly to step aside.

But how to prove humanity if they hid in the high vaults of the sky? How to bring them nearer and provide answers to the many questions?

"They saved us from the avalanche."

Father Peregrine arose, moved off among the rocks, and began to climb the nearest hill until he came to a place where a cliff dropped sheerly to a floor two hundred feet below. He was choking from his vigorous climb in the frosty air. He stood, getting his breath.

"If I fell from here, it would surely kill me."

He let a pebble drop. Moments later it clicked on the rocks below.

"The Lord would never forgive me."

He tossed another pebble.

"It wouldn't be suicide, would it, if I did it out of Love...?"

He lifted his gaze to the blue spheres. "But first, another try." He called to them: "Hello, hello!"

The echoes tumbled upon each other, but the blue fires did not blink or move.

He talked to them for five minutes. When he stopped, he peered down and saw Father Stone, still indignantly asleep, below in the little camp.

"I must prove everything." Father Peregrine stepped to the cliff rim. "I am an old man. I am not afraid. Surely the Lord will understand that I am doing this for Him?"

He drew a deep breath. All his life swam through his eyes, and he thought, In a moment shall I die? I am afraid that I love living much too much. But I love things more.

And, thinking thus, he stepped off the cliff.

He fell.

"Fool!" he cried. He tumbled end over end. "You were wrong!" The rocks rushed up at him, and he saw himself dashed on them and sent to glory. "Why did I do this thing?" But he knew the answer, and an instant later was calm as he fell. The wind roared around him and the rocks hurtled to meet him.

And then there was a shift of stars, a glimmering of blue light, and he felt himself surrounded by blueness and suspended. A moment later he was deposited, with a gentle bump, upon the rocks, where he sat a full moment, alive, and touching himself, and looking up at those blue lights that had withdrawn instantly.

"You saved me!" he whispered. "You wouldn't let me die. You knew it was wrong."

He rushed over to Father Stone, who still lay quietly asleep. "Father, Father, wake up!" He shook him and brought him around. "Father, they saved me!"

"Who saved you?" Father Stone blinked and sat up.

Father Peregrine related his experience.

"A dream, a nightmare; go back to sleep," said Father Stone irritably. "You and your circus balloons."

"But I was awake!"

"Now, now, Father, calm yourself. There now."

"You don't believe me? Have you a gun? Yes, there, let me have it."

"What are you going to do?" Father Stone handed over the small pistol they had brought along for protection against snakes or other similar unpredictable animals.

Father Peregrine seized the pistol. "I'll prove it!"

He pointed the pistol at his own hand and fired.

"Stop!"

There was a shimmer of light, and before their eyes the bullet *stood* upon the air, poised an inch from his open palm. It hung for a moment, surrounded by a blue phosphorescence. Then it fell, hissing, into the dust.

Father Peregrine fired the gun three times—at his hand, at his leg, at his body. The three bullets hovered, glittering, and, like dead insects, fell at their feet.

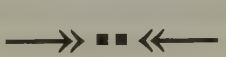
"You see?" said Father Peregrine, letting his arm fall, and allowing the pistol to drop after the bullets. "They know. They understand. They are not animals. They think and judge and live in a moral climate. What animal would save me from myself like this? There is no animal would do that. Only another man, Father. Now, do you believe?"

Father Stone was watching the sky and the blue lights, and now, silently, he dropped to one knee and picked up the warm bullets and cupped them in his hand. He closed his hand tight.

The sun was rising behind them.

"I think we had better go down to the others and tell them of this and bring them back up here," said Father Peregrine.

By the time the sun was up, they were well on their way back to the rocket.



Father Peregrine drew the round circle in the center of the blackboard.

"This is Christ, the son of the Father."

He pretended not to hear the other Fathers' sharp intake of breath.

"This is Christ, in all his Glory," he continued.

"It looks like a geometry problem," observed Father Stone.

"A fortunate comparison, for we deal with symbols here. Christ is no less Christ, you must admit, in being represented by a circle or a square. For centuries the cross has symbolized his love and agony. So this circle will be the Martian Christ. This is how we shall bring him to Mars."

The Fathers stirred fretfully and looked at each other.

"You, Brother Mathias, will create, in glass, a replica of this circle, a globe, filled with bright fire. It will stand upon the altar."

"A cheap magic trick," muttered Father Stone.

Father Peregrine went on patiently: "On the contrary. We are giving them God in an understandable image. If Christ had come to us on Earth as an octopus, would we have accepted him readily?" He spread his hands. "Was it then a cheap magic trick of the Lord's to bring us Christ through Jesus, in man's shape? After we bless the church we build here and sanctify its altar and this symbol, do you think Christ would refuse to inhabit the shape before us? You know in your hearts he would not refuse."

"But the body of a soulless animal!" said Brother Mathias.

"We've already gone over that, many times since we returned this morning, Brother Mathias. These creatures saved us from the avalanche. They realized that self-destruction was sinful, and prevented it, time after time. Therefore we must build a church in the hills, live with them, to find their own special ways of sinning, the alien ways, and help them to discover God."

The Fathers did not seem pleased at the prospect.

"Is it because they are so odd to the eye?" wondered Father Peregrine. "But what is a shape? Only a cup for the blazing soul that God provides us all. If tomorrow I found that sea lions suddenly possessed free will, intellect, knew when not to sin, knew what life was and tempered justice with mercy and life with love, then I would build an undersea cathedral. And if the sparrows should, miraculously, with God's will gain everlasting souls tomorrow, I would freight a church with helium and take after them, for all souls, in any shape, if they have free will and are aware of their sins, will burn in hell unless given their rightful communions. I would not let a Martian sphere burn in hell, either, for it is a sphere only in mine eyes. When I close my eyes it stands before me, an intelligence, a love, a soul—and I must not deny it."

"But that glass globe you wish placed on the altar," protested Father Stone.

"Consider the Chinese," replied Father Peregrine imperturbably. "What sort of Christ do Christian Chinese worship? An oriental Christ, naturally. You've all seen oriental Nativity scenes. How is Christ dressed? In Eastern robes. Where does he walk? In Chinese settings of bamboo and misty mountain and crooked tree. His eyelids taper, his cheekbones rise. Each country, each race adds something to our Lord. I am reminded of the Virgin of Guadalupe, to whom all Mexico pays its love. Her skin? Have you noticed the paintings of her? A dark skin, like that of her worshipers. Is that blasphemy? Not at all. It is not logical that men should accept a God, no matter how real, of another color. I often wonder why our missionaries do well in Africa, with a snow-white Christ. Perhaps because white is a sacred color, in albino, or any other form, to the African tribes. Given time, mightn't Christ darken there too? The form does not matter. Content is everything. We cannot expect these Martians to accept an alien form. We shall give them Christ in their own image."

"There's a flaw in your reasoning, Father," said Father Stone. "Won't the Martians suspect us of hypocrisy? They will realize that we don't worship a round, globular Christ, but a man with limbs and a head. How do we explain the difference?"

"By showing there is none. Christ will fill any vessel that is offered. Bodies or globes, he is there, and each will worship the same thing in a different guise. What is more, we must *believe* in this globe we give the Martians. We must believe in a shape which is meaningless to us as to form. This spheroid *will* be Christ. And we must

remember that we ourselves, and the shape of our Earth Christ, would be meaningless, ridiculous, a squander of material to these Martians."

Father Peregrine laid aside his chalk. "Now let us go into the hills and build our church."

The Fathers began to pack their equipment.

The church was not a church, but an area cleared of rocks, a plateau on one of the low mountains, its soil smoothed and brushed, and an altar established whereon Brother Mathias placed the fiery globe he had constructed.

At the end of six days of work the "church" was ready.

"What shall we do with this?" Father Stone tapped an iron bell they had brought along. "What does a bell mean to *them*?"

"I imagine I brought it for our own comfort," admitted Father Peregrine. "We need a few familiarities. This church seems so little like a church. And we feel somewhat absurd here—even I; for it is something new, this business of converting the creatures of another world. I feel like a ridiculous playactor at times. And then I pray to God to lend me strength."

"Many of the Fathers are unhappy. Some of them joke about all this, Father Peregrine."

"I know. We'll put this bell in a small tower, for their comfort, anyway."

"What about the organ?"

"We'll play it at the first service, tomorrow."

"But, the Martians—"

"I know. But again, I suppose, for our own comfort, our own music. Later we may discover theirs."

They arose very early on Sunday morning and moved through the coldness like pale phantoms, rime tinkling on their habits; covered with chimes they were, shaking down showers of silver water.

"I wonder if it *is* Sunday here on Mars?" mused Father Peregrine, but seeing Father Stone wince, he hastened on, "It might be Tuesday or Thursday—who knows? But no matter. My idle fancy. It's Sunday to us. Come."

The Fathers walked into the flat, wide area of the "church" and knelt, shivering and blue-lipped.

Father Peregrine said a little prayer and put his cold fingers to the organ keys. The music went up like a flight of pretty birds. He touched the keys like a man moving his hands among the weeds of a wild garden, startling up great soarings of beauty into the hills.

The music calmed the air. It smelled the fresh smell of morning. The music drifted into the mountains and shook down mineral powders in a dusty rain.

The Fathers waited.

"Well, Father Peregrine." Father Stone eyed the empty sky where the sun was rising, furnace-red. "I don't see our friends."

"Let me try again." Father Peregrine was perspiring.

He built an architecture of Bach, stone by exquisite stone, raising a music cathedral so vast that its farthest chancels were in Nineveh, its farthest dome at St. Peter's

left hand. The music stayed and did not crash in ruin when it was over, but partook of a series of white clouds and was carried away among other lands.

The sky was still empty.

"They'll come!" But Father Peregrine felt the panic in his chest, very small, growing. "Let us pray. Let us ask them to come. They read minds; they *know*."

The Fathers lowered themselves yet again, in rustlings and whispers. They prayed.

And to the East, out of the icy mountains of seven o'clock on Sunday morning or perhaps Thursday morning or maybe Monday morning on Mars, came the soft, fiery globes.

They hovered and sank and filled the area around the shivering priests. "Thank you; oh, thank you, Lord." Father Peregrine shut his eyes tight and played the music, and when it was done he turned and gazed upon his wondrous congregation.

And a voice touched his mind, and the voice said:

"We have come for a little while."

"You may stay," said Father Peregrine.

"For a little while only," said the voice quietly. "We have come to tell you certain things. We should have spoken sooner. But we had hoped that you might go on your way if left alone."

Father Peregrine started to speak, but the voice hushed him.

"We are the Old Ones," the voice said, and it entered him like a blue gaseous flare and burned in the chambers of his head. "We are the old Martians, who left our marble cities and went into the hills, forsaking the material life we had lived. So very long ago we became these things that we now are. Once we were men, with bodies and legs and arms such as yours. The legend has it that one of us, a good man, discovered a way to free man's soul and intellect, to free him of bodily ills and melancholies, of deaths and transfigurations, of ill humors and senilities, and so we took on the look of lightning and blue fire and have lived in the winds and skies and hills forever after that, neither prideful nor arrogant, neither rich nor poor, passionate nor cold. We have lived apart from those we left behind, those other men of this world, and how we came to be has been forgotten, the process lost; but we shall never die, nor do harm. We have put away the sins of the body and live in God's grace. We covet no other property; we have no property. We do not steal, nor kill, nor lust, nor hate. We live in happiness. We cannot reproduce; we do not eat or drink or make war. All the sensualities and childishnesses and sins of the body were stripped away when our bodies were put aside. We have left sin behind, Father Peregrine, and it is burned like the leaves in the autumn wicker, and it is gone like the soiled snow of an evil winter, and it is gone like the sexual flowers of a red-and-yellow spring, and it is gone like the panting nights of hottest summer, and our season is temperate and our clime is rich in thought."

Father Peregrine was standing now, for the voice touched him at such a pitch that it almost shook him from his senses. It was an ecstasy and a fire washing through him.

"We wish to tell you that we appreciate your building this place for us, but we have no need of it, for each of us is a temple unto himself and we need no place wherein to cleanse ourselves. Forgive us for not coming to you sooner, but we are separate and

apart and have talked to no one for ten thousand years, nor have we interfered in any way with the life of this planet. It has come into your mind now that we are the lilies of the field; we toil not, neither do we spin. You are right. And so we suggest that you take the parts of this temple into your own new cities and there cleanse them. For, rest assured, we are happy, and at peace."

The Fathers were on their knees in the vast blue light, and Father Peregrine was down, too, and they were weeping, and it did not matter that their time had been wasted; it did not matter to them at all.

The blue spheres murmured and began to rise once more, on a breath of cool air.

"May I"—cried Father Peregrine, not daring to ask, eyes closed—"may I come again, someday, that I may learn from you?"

The blue fires blazed. The air trembled.

Yes. Someday he might come again. Someday.

And then the Fire Balloons blew away and were gone, and he was like a child, on his knees, tears streaming from his eyes, crying to himself, "Come back, come back!" And at any moment Grandfather might lift him and carry him upstairs to his bedroom in a long-gone Ohio town.

They filed down out of the hills at sunset. Looking back, Father Peregrine saw the blue fires burning. No, he thought, we couldn't build a church for the likes of you. You're Beauty itself. What church could compete with the fireworks of the pure soul?

Father Stone moved in silence beside him. And at last he spoke: "The way I see it is there's a Truth on every planet. All parts of the Big Truth. On a certain day they'll all fit together like the pieces of a jigsaw. This has been a shaking experience. I'll never doubt again, Father Peregrine. For this Truth here is as true as Earth's Truth, and they lie side by side. And we'll go on to other worlds, adding the sum of the parts of the Truth until one day the whole Total will stand before us like the light of a new day."

"That's a lot, coming from you, Father Stone."

"I'm sorry now, in a way, we're going down to the town to handle our own kind. Those blue lights now. When they settled about us, and that *voice*..." Father Stone shivered.

Father Peregrine reached out to take the other's arm. They walked together.

"And you know," said Father Stone finally, fixing his eyes on Brother Mathias, who strode ahead with the glass sphere tenderly carried in his arms, that glass sphere with the blue phosphorus light glowing forever inside it, "you know, Father Peregrine, that globe there—"

"Yes?"

"It's Him. It *is* Him, after all."

Father Peregrine smiled, and they walked down out of the hills toward the new town.

FEBRUARY 2034:

THE INTERIM

They brought in fifteen thousand lumber feet of Oregon pine to build Tenth City, and seventy-nine thousand feet of California redwood and they hammered together a clean, neat little town by the edge of the stone canals. On Sunday nights you could see red, blue, and green stained-glass light in the churches and hear the voices singing the numbered hymns. "We will now sing 79. We will now sing 94." And in certain houses you heard the hard clatter of a typewriter, the novelist at work; or the scratch of a pen, the poet at work; or no sound at all, the former beachcomber at work. It was as if, in many ways, a great earthquake had shaken loose the roots and cellars of an Iowa town, and then, in an instant, a whirlwind twister of Oz-like proportions had carried the entire town off to Mars to set it down without a bump....

APRIL 2034:

THE MUSICIANS

The boys would hike far out into the Martian country. They carried odorous paper bags into which from time to time upon the long walk they would insert their noses to inhale the rich smell of the ham and mayonnaised pickles, and to listen to the liquid gurgle of the orange soda in the warming bottles. Swinging their grocery bags full of clean watery green onions and odorous liverwurst and red catsup and white bread, they would dare each other on past the limits set by their stern mothers. They would run, yelling:

"First one there gets to kick!"

They hiked in summer, autumn, or winter. Autumn was most fun, because then they imagined, like on Earth, they were scuttering through autumn leaves.

They would come like a scatter of jackstones on the marble flats beside the canals, the candy-cheeked boys with blue-agate eyes, panting onion-tainted commands to each other. For now that they had reached the dead, forbidden town it was no longer a matter of "Last one there's a girl!" or "First one gets to play Musician!" Now the dead town's doors lay wide and they thought they could hear the faintest crackle, like autumn leaves, from inside. They would hush themselves forward, by each other's elbows, carrying sticks, remembering their parents had told them, "Not there! No, to none of the old towns! Watch where you hike. You'll get the beating of your life when you come home. We'll check your shoes!"

And there they stood in the dead city, a heap of boys, their hiking lunches half devoured, daring each other in shrieky whispers.

"Here goes nothing!" And suddenly one of them took off, into the nearest stone house, through the door, across the living room, and into the bedroom where, without half looking, he would kick about, thrash his feet, and the black leaves would fly through the air, brittle, thin as tissue cut from midnight sky. Behind him would race six others, and the first boy there would be the Musician, playing the white xylophone bones beneath the outer covering of black flakes. A great skull would roll to view, like a snowball; they shouted! Ribs, like spider legs, plangent as a dull harp, and then the black flakes of mortality blowing all about them in their scuffling dance; the boys pushed and heaved and fell in the leaves, in the death that had turned the dead to flakes and dryness, into a game played by boys whose stomachs gurgled with orange pop.

And then out of one house into another, into seventeen houses, mindful that each of the towns in its turn was being burned clean of its horrors by the Firemen, antiseptic warriors with shovels and bins, shoveling away at the ebony tatters and

peppermint-stick bones, slowly but assuredly separating the terrible from the normal; so they must play very hard, these boys, the Firemen would soon be here!

Then, luminous with sweat, they gnashed at their last sandwiches. With a final kick, a final marimba concert, a final autumnal lunge through leaf stacks, they went home.

Their mothers examined their shoes for black flakelets which, when discovered, resulted in scalding baths and fatherly beatings.

By the year's end the Firemen had raked the autumn leaves and white xylophones away, and it was no more fun.

THE WILDERNESS

Oh, the Good Time has come at last—

It was twilight and Janice and Leonora packed steadily in their summer house, singing songs, eating little, and holding to each other when necessary. But they never glanced at the window where the night gathered deep and the stars came out bright and cold.

"Listen!" said Janice.

A sound like a steamboat down the river, but it was a rocket in the sky. And beyond that—banjos playing? No, only the summer night crickets in this year 2034. Ten thousand sounds breathed through the town and the weather. Janice, head bent, listened. Long, long ago, 1849, this very street had breathed the voices of ventriloquists, preachers, fortune-tellers, fools, scholars, gamblers, gathered at this self-same Independence, Missouri. Waiting for the moist earth to bake and the great tidal grasses to come up heavy enough to hold the weight of their carts, their wagons, their indiscriminate destinies, and their dreams.

Oh, the Good Time has come at last,
To Mars we are a-going, Sir,
Five Thousand Women in the sky,
That's quite a springtime sowing,
Sir!

"That's an old Wyoming song," said Leonora. "Change the words and it's fine for 2034."

Janice lifted a matchbox of food pills, calculating the totals of things carried in those high-axled, tall-bedded wagons. For each man, each woman, incredible tonnages! Hams, bacon slabs, sugar, salt, flour, dried fruits, pilot bread, citric acid, water, ginger, pepper—a list as big as the land! Yet here, today, pills that fit a wristwatch fed you not from Fort Laramie to Hangtown, but all across a wilderness of stars.

Janice threw wide the closet door and almost screamed.

Darkness and night and all the spaces between the stars looked out at her.

Long years ago two things had happened. Her sister had locked her, shrieking, in a closet. And, at a party, playing hide-and-seek, she had run through the kitchen and into a long dark hall. But it wasn't a hall. It was an unlit stairwell, a swallowing blackness. She had run out upon empty air. She had pedalled her feet, screamed, and

fallen! Fallen in midnight blackness. Into the cellar. It took a long while, a heartbeat, to fall. And she had smothered in that closet a long, long time without daylight, without friends, no one to hear her screamings. Away from everything, locked in darkness. Falling in darkness. Shrieking!

The two memories.

Now, with the closet door wide, with darkness like a velvet shroud hung before her to be stroked by a trembling hand, with the darkness like a black panther breathing there, looking at her with unlit eyes, the two memories rushed out. Space and a falling. Space and being locked away, screaming. She and Leonora working steadily, packing, being careful not to glance out the window at the frightening Milky Way and the vast emptiness. Only to have the long-familiar closet, with its private night, remind them at last of their destiny.

This was how it would be, out there, sliding towards the stars, in the night, in the great hideous black closet, screaming, but no one to hear. Falling forever among meteor clouds and godless comets. Down the elevator shaft. Down the nightmare coalchute into nothingness.

She screamed. None of it came out of her mouth. It collided upon itself in her chest and head. She screamed. She slammed the closet door! She lay against it! She felt the darkness breathe and yammer at the door and she held it tight, eyes watering. She stood there a long time, until the trembling vanished, watching Leonora work. And the hysteria, thus ignored, drained away and away, and at last was gone. A wristwatch ticked, with a clean sound of normality, in the room.

"Sixty *million* miles." She moved at last to the window as if it were a deep well, "I can't believe that men on Mars, tonight, are building towns, waiting for us."

"The only thing to believe is catching our Rocket tomorrow."

Janice raised a white gown like a ghost in the room.

"Strange, strange. To marry—on another world."

"Let's go to bed."

"No! The call comes at midnight. I couldn't sleep, thinking how to tell Will I've decided to take the Mars Rocket. Oh, Leonora, think of it, my voice travelling sixty million miles on the light-phone to him. I changed my mind so quick—I'm scared!"

"Our *last* night on Earth."

Now they really knew and accepted it, now the knowledge had found them out. They were going away, and they might never come back. They were leaving the town of Independence in the state of Missouri on the continent of North America, surrounded by one ocean which was the Atlantic and another the Pacific, none of which could be put in their travelling cases. They had shrunk from this final knowledge. Now it was facing them. And they were struck numb.

"Our children, they won't be Americans, or Earth people at all. We'll all be Martians, the rest of our lives."

"I don't want to go!" cried Janice, suddenly.

The panic rose in her, with ice and fire.

"I'm afraid! The space, the darkness, the rocket, the meteors! *Everything* gone! Why should I go out there!"

Leonora took hold of her shoulders and held her close, rocking her. "It's a New World. It's like the old days. The men first and the women following."

"Why, why should I go, tell me!"

"Because," said Leonora, at last, quietly, seating her on the bed, "Will is up there."

His name was good to hear. Janice quieted.

"These men make it so hard," said Leonora. "Used to be if a woman ran two hundred miles after a man it was something. Then they made it a thousand miles. And now they put a whole universe between us. But that can't stop us, can it?"

"I'm afraid I'll be a fool on the Rocket."

"I'll be a fool with you." Leonora got up. "Now, let's walk around town, let's see everything one last time."

Janice stared out at the town. "Tomorrow night, this'll all be here, but we won't. People'll wake up, eat, work, sleep, wake again, but we won't know it, and they'll never miss us."

Leonora and Janice moved around each other as if they couldn't find the door.

"Come on."

They opened the door, switched off the lights, stepped out, and shut the door behind them.

In the sky there was a great coming-in and coming-in. Vast flowering motions, huge whistlings and whirlings, snowstorms falling. Helicopters, white flakes, dropping quietly. From west and east and north and south the women were arriving, arriving, their hearts neatly tissue-papered in their suitcases. Through all of the night sky you saw helicopters blizzard down. The hotels were full, private homes were making accommodations, tent cities rose in meadows and pastures like strange, ugly flowers, and the town and the country were warm with more than summer tonight. Warm with women's pink faces and the sunburnt faces of new men watching the sky. Beyond the hills rockets tried their fire, and a sound like a giant organ pressed upon all its keys at once, shuddered every crystal window and every hidden bone. You felt it in your jaw, your toes, your fingers, a shivering.

Leonora and Janice sat in the drugstore among strange women.

"You ladies look pretty, but you sure look sad," said the soda fountain man.

"Two chocolate malteds." Leonora smiled for both of them, as if Janice were mute.

They gazed at the chocolate drink as if it was a rare museum painting. Malts would be scarce, for many years, on Mars.

Janice fussed in her purse and took out an envelope, reluctantly, and laid it on the marble counter.

"This is from Will to me. It came in the rocket mail two days ago. It was this that made up my mind for me, made me decide to go. I didn't tell you. I want you to see it now. Go ahead, read the note."

Leonora shook the note out of the envelope and read it aloud:

"'Dear Janice: This is *our* house if you decide to come to Mars. Will.'"

Leonora tapped the envelope again and a color photograph dropped out, glistening, on the counter. It was a picture of a house, a dark, mossy, ancient, caramel-brown, comfortable house with red flowers and green cool ferns bordering it, and a disreputably hairy ivy on the porch.

"But, Janice!"

"What?"

"This is a picture of your house, here on Earth, here on Elm Street!"

"No. Look close." And they looked again, together, and on both sides of the comfortable dark house and behind it was scenery that was not Earth scenery. The soil was a strange color of violet, and the grass was the faintest bit red, and the sky glowed like a gray diamond, and a strange crooked tree grew to one side, looking like an old woman with crystals in her white hair.

"That's the house Will's built for me," said Janice, "on Mars. It helps to look at it. All yesterday, when I had the chance, alone, and was most afraid and panicky, I took out this picture and looked at it."

They both gazed at the dark comfortable house sixty million miles away, familiar but unfamiliar, old but new, a yellow light shining in the right front parlor window.

"That man Will," said Leonora, nodding her head, "knows just what he's doing."

They finished their drinks. Outside, a vast warm crowd of strangers wandered by and the "snow" fell steadily in the summer sky.

They bought many silly things to take with them, bags of lemon candy, glossy women's magazines, fragile perfumes (let the take-off weighers worry later about what constitutes "essential load"); and then they walked out into the town and, not minding the expense, rented two belted jackets—two small machines that refused gravity and imitated the butterfly—and touched the delicate controls and felt themselves whispered like white blossom petals over the town. "Anywhere," said Leonora, "anywhere at all."

They let the wind blow them where it would, they let the wind take them through the night of summer apple trees and the night of warm preparation, over the lovely town, over the houses of childhood and other days, over schools and avenues, over creeks and meadows and farms so familiar that each grain of wheat was a golden coin. They blew as leaves must blow before the threat of a fire-wind, with warning whispers and summer lightning crackling among the folded hills. They saw the milk-dust country roads where not so long ago they had drifted in moonlit helicopters in great whorls of sound spiraling down to touch beside cool night streams with the young men who were now gone.

They floated in an immense sigh above a town already made remote by the little space between themselves and the earth, a town receding behind them in a black river and coming up in a tidal wave of lights and color ahead, untouchable and a dream now, already smeared in their eyes with nostalgia, with a panic of memory that began before the thing was gone.

Blown quietly, eddying, they gazed secretly at a hundred faces of dear friends they were leaving behind, the lamplit people held and framed by windows which slid by on the wind, it seemed; all of Time breathing them along. There was no tree they did not examine for old confessions of love carved and whittled there, no sidewalk they

did not skim across as over fields of mica-snow. For the first time they knew that their town was beautiful and the lonely lights and the ancient bricks beautiful, and they both felt their eyes grow large with the beauty of this feast they were giving themselves. All floated upon an evening carousel, with fitful drifts of music wafting up here and there, and voices calling and murmuring from houses that were whitely haunted by television.

The two women passed like needles, sewing one tree to the next with their perfume. Their eyes were too full, and yet they kept putting away each detail, each shadow, each solitary oak and elm, each passing car upon the small snaking streets below, until not only their eyes but their heads and then their hearts were too full.

I feel like I'm dead, thought Janice, and in the graveyard on a spring night and everything alive but me and everyone moving and ready to go on with life without me. It's like I felt each spring when I was very young, passing the graveyard and weeping for them because they were dead and it didn't seem fair, on nights as soft as that, that I was alive. I was guilty of living. And now here, tonight, I feel they have taken me from the graveyard and let me go above the town just once more to see what it is like to be living, to be a town and a people, before they slam the black door on me again.

Softly, softly, like two white paper lanterns on a night wind, the women moved over their lifetime and their past, and over the meadows where the tent cities glowed and the highways where supply trucks would be clustered and running until dawn. They hovered above it all for a long time.

The courthouse clock was booming eleven-forty-five when they came like spider webs floating from the stars, touching on the moonlit pavement before Janice's old house. The city was asleep, and Janice's house waited for them to come in searching for *their* sleep, which was not there.

"Is this *us*, here?" asked Janice. "Janice Smith and Leonora Holmes, in the year 2034?"

"Yes."

Janice licked her lips and stood straight. "I wish it was some other year."

"1492? 1612?" Leonora sighed and the wind in the trees sighed with her, moving away. "It's always Columbus Day or Plymouth Rock Day, and I'll be darned if I know what we women can do about it."

"Be old maids."

"Or, do just what we're doing."

They opened the door of the warm night house, the sounds of the town dying slowly in their ears. As they shut the door, the phone began to ring.

"The call!" cried Janice, running.

Leonora came into the bedroom after her and already Janice had the receiver up and was saying, "Hello, hello!" And the operator in a far city was readying the immense apparatus which would tie two worlds together, and the two women waited, one sitting and pale, the other standing but just as pale, bent towards her.

There was a long pause, full of stars and time, a waiting pause not unlike the last three years for all of them. And now the moment had arrived, and it was Janice's turn to phone through millions upon millions of miles of meteors and comets, running away from the yellow sun which might boil or burn her words or scorch the meaning from them, her voice like a silver needle through everything, in stitches of talking, across the big night, reverberating from the moons of Mars and rushing on. And then her voice found its way to a man in a room in a city there on another world, five minutes by radio away. And her message was this:

"Hello, Will. This is Janice!"

She swallowed.

"They say I haven't much time. A minute."

She closed her eyes.

"I want to talk slow but they say talk fast and get it all in. So, I want to say—I've decided. I will come up there. I'll go on the Rocket tomorrow. I *will* come up there to you, after all. And I love you. I hope you can hear me. I love you. It's been so long..."

Her voice motioned on its way to that unseen world. Now, with her message sent, the words said, she wanted to call them back, to censor, to rearrange them, to make a prettier sentence, a fairer explanation of her soul. But already the words were hung between planets and if, by some cosmic radiation, they could have been illuminated, caught fire in vaporous wonder there, her love would have lit a dozen worlds and startled the night side of Earth into a premature dawn, she thought. Now the words were not hers at all, they belonged to space, they belonged to no one until they arrived, and they were travelling at 186,000 miles a second to their target.

What will he say to me? What will he say back in *his* minute of time? she wondered. She fussed with and twisted the watch on her wrist, and the light-phone receiver on her ear crackled and space talked to her with electrical jigs and dances and audible auroras.

"Has he replied?" whispered Leonora.

"Shhh!" said Janice, bending, as if sick.

Then the voice came through space from him.

"I hear him!" cried Janice.

"What does he say?"

The voice called out from Mars and took itself through the places where there was no sunrise or sunset, but always the night with a sun in the middle of the blackness. And somewhere between Mars and Earth everything of the message was lost, perhaps in a sweep of electrical gravity rushing by on the floodtides of a meteor, or interfered with by a rain of silver meteors. In any event, the small words and the unimportant words of the message were washed away. And his voice came through saying only one word:

"...love..."

After that, there was the huge night again and the sound of stars turning and suns whispering to themselves and the sound of her heart, like another world in space, filling her earphones.

"Did you *hear* him?" asked Leonora.

Janice could only nod.

"What did he say, what did he say?" cried Leonora.

But Janice could not tell anyone, it was much too good to tell. She sat, listening to that one word again and again, as her memory played it back to her. She sat listening, while Leonora took the phone away from her without her knowing it, and put it back upon its hook.

Then they were in bed and the lights out and the night wind blowing through the rooms a smell of the long journey in darkness and stars, and their voices talking of tomorrow, and the days after tomorrow which would not be days at all, but day-nights of timeless time; their voices faded away into sleep or wakeful thinking, and Janice lay alone in her bed.

Is this how it was over a century ago, she wondered, when the women, the night before, lay ready for sleep, or not ready, in the small towns of the East, and heard the sound of horses in the night and the creak of the Conestoga wagons ready to go, and the brooding of oxen under the trees, and the cry of children already lonely before their time? All the sounds of arrivals and departures into the deep forests and fields, the blacksmiths working in their own red hells through midnight? And the smell of bacons and hams ready for the journeying, and the heavy feel of the wagons like ships foundering with goods, with water in the wooden kegs to tilt and slop across prairies, and the chickens hysterical in their slung-beneath-the-wagon crates, and the dogs running out to the wilderness ahead and, fearful, running back with a look of empty space in their eyes? Is this then how it was so long ago? On the rim of the precipice, on the edge of the cliff of stars. In their time the smell of buffalo, and in our time the smell of the Rocket. Is this then how it was?

And she decided, as sleep assumed the dreaming for her, that yes, yes indeed, very much so, irrevocably, this was as it had always been and would forever continue to be.

2035–2036:

THE NAMING OF NAMES

They came to the strange blue lands and put their names upon the lands. Here was Hinkston Creek and Lustig Corners and Black River and Driscoll Forest and Peregrine Mountain and Wilder Town, all the names of people and the things that the people did. Here was the place where Martians killed the first Earth Men, and it was Red Town and had to do with blood. And here where the second expedition was destroyed, and it was named Second Try, and each of the other places where the rocket men had set down their fiery caldrons to burn the land, the names were left like cinders, and of course there was a Spender Hill and a Nathaniel York Town....

The old Martian names were names of water and air and hills. They were the names of snows that emptied south in stone canals to fill the empty seas. And the names of sealed and buried sorcerers and towers and obelisks. And the rockets struck at the names like hammers, breaking away the marble into shale, shattering the crockery milestones that named the old towns, in the rubble of which great pylons were plunged with new names: IRON TOWN, STEEL TOWN, ALUMINUM CITY, ELECTRIC VILLAGE, GRAIN VILLA, DETROIT II, all the mechanical names and the metal names from Earth.

And after the towns were built and named, the graveyards were built and named, too: Green Hill, Moss Town, Boot Hill, Bide a Wee; and the first dead went into their graves....

But after everything was pinned down and neat and in its place, when everything was safe and certain, when the towns were well enough fixed and the loneliness was at a minimum, then the sophisticates came in from Earth. They came on parties and vacations, on little shopping trips for trinkets and photographs and the "atmosphere"; they came to study and apply sociological laws; they came with stars and badges and rules and regulations, bringing some of the red tape that had crawled across Earth like an alien weed, and letting it grow on Mars wherever it could take root. They began to plan people's lives and libraries; they began to instruct and push about the very people who had come to Mars to get away from being instructed and ruled and pushed about.

And it was inevitable that some of these people pushed back....

USHER II

"'During the whole of a dull, dark, and soundless day in the autumn of the year, when the clouds hung oppressively low in the heavens, I had been passing alone, on horseback, through a singularly dreary tract of country, and at length found myself, as the shades of evening drew on, within view of the melancholy House of Usher....'"

Mr. William Stendahl paused in his quotation. There, upon a low black hill, stood the House, its cornerstone bearing the inscription 2036 A.D.

Mr. Bigelow, the architect, said, "It's completed. Here's the key, Mr. Stendahl."

The two men stood together silently in the quiet autumn afternoon. Blueprints rustled on the raven grass at their feet.

"The House of Usher," said Mr. Stendahl with pleasure. "Planned, built, bought, paid for. Wouldn't Mr. Poe be *delighted*?"

Mr. Bigelow squinted. "Is it everything you wanted, sir?"

"Yes!"

"Is the color right? Is it *desolate* and *terrible*?"

"*Very* desolate, *very* terrible!"

"The walls are—*bleak*?"

"Amazingly so!"

"The tarn, is it 'black and lurid' enough?"

"Most incredibly black and lurid."

"And the sedge—we've dyed it, you know—is it the proper gray and ebon?"

"Hideous!"

Mr. Bigelow consulted his architectural plans. From these he quoted in part: "Does the whole structure cause an 'iciness, a sickening of the heart, a dreariness of thought'? The House, the lake, the land, Mr. Stendahl?"

"Mr. Bigelow, it's worth every penny! My God, it's beautiful!"

"Thank you. I had to work in total ignorance. Thank the Lord you had your own private rockets or we'd never have been allowed to bring most of the equipment through. You notice, it's always twilight here, this land, always October, barren, sterile, dead. It took a bit of doing. We killed everything. Ten thousand tons of DDT. Not a snake, frog, or Martian fly left! Twilight always, Mr. Stendahl; I'm proud of that. There are machines, hidden, which blot out the sun. It's always properly 'dreary.'"

Stendahl drank it in, the dreariness, the oppression, the fetid vapors, the whole "atmosphere," so delicately contrived and fitted. And that House! That crumbling

horror, that evil lake, the fungi, the extensive decay! Plastic or otherwise, who could guess?

He looked at the autumn sky. Somewhere above, beyond, far off, was the sun. Somewhere it was the month of April on the planet Mars, a yellow month with a blue sky. Somewhere above, the rockets burned down to civilize a beautifully dead planet. The sound of their screaming passage was muffled by this dim, soundproofed world, this ancient autumn world.

"Now that my job's done," said Mr. Bigelow uneasily, "I feel free to ask what you're going to do with all this."

"With Usher? Haven't you guessed?"

"No."

"Does the name Usher mean nothing to you?"

"Nothing."

"Well, what about *this* name: Edgar Allan Poe?"

Mr. Bigelow shook his head.

"Of course." Stendahl snorted delicately, a combination of dismay and contempt. "How could I expect you to know blessed Mr. Poe? He died a long while ago, before Lincoln. All of his books were burned in the Great Fire. That's thirty years ago—2006."

"Ah," said Mr. Bigelow wisely. "One of *those*!"

"Yes, one of those, Bigelow. He and Lovecraft and Hawthorne and Ambrose Bierce and all the tales of terror and fantasy and horror and, for that matter, tales of the future were burned. Heartlessly. They passed a law. Oh, it started very small. In 1999 it was a grain of sand. They began by controlling books of cartoons and then detective books and, of course, films, one way or another, one group or another, political bias, religious prejudice, union pressures; there was always a minority afraid of something, and a great majority afraid of the dark, afraid of the future, afraid of the past, afraid of the present, afraid of themselves and shadows of themselves."

"I see."

"Afraid of the word 'politics' (which eventually became a synonym for Communism among the more reactionary elements, so I hear, and it was worth your life to use the word!), and with a screw tightened here, a bolt fastened there, a push, a pull, a yank, art and literature were soon like a great twine of taffy strung about, being twisted in braids and tied in knots and thrown in all directions, until there was no more resiliency and no more savor to it. Then the film cameras chopped short and the theaters turned dark, and the print presses trickled down from a great Niagara of reading matter to a mere innocuous dripping of 'pure' material. Oh, the word 'escape' was radical, too, I tell you!"

"Was it?"

"It was! Every man, they said, must face reality. Must face the Here and Now! Everything that was *not so* must go. All the beautiful literary lies and flights of fancy must be shot in mid-air! So they lined them up against a library wall one Sunday morning thirty years ago, in 2006; they lined them up, St. Nicholas and the Headless Horseman and Snow White and Rumpelstiltskin and Mother Goose—oh, what a

wailing!—and shot them down, and burned the paper castles and the fairy frogs and old kings and the people who lived happily ever after (for of course it was a fact that *nobody* lived happily ever after!), and Once Upon A Time became No More! And they spread the ashes of the Phantom Rickshaw with the rubble of the Land of Oz; they filleted the bones of Glinda the Good and Ozma and shattered Polychrome in a spectroscope and served Jack Pumpkinhead with meringue at the Biologists' Ball! The Beanstalk died in a bramble of red tape! Sleeping Beauty awoke at the kiss of a scientist and expired at the fatal puncture of his syringe. And they made Alice drink something from a bottle which reduced her to a size where she could no longer cry 'Curiouser and curiouser,' and they gave the Looking Glass one hammer blow to smash it and every Red King and Oyster away!"

He clenched his fists. Lord, how immediate it was! His face was red and he was gasping for breath.

As for Mr. Bigelow, he was astounded at this long explosion. He blinked and at last said, "Sorry. Don't know what you're talking about. Just names to me. From what I hear, the Burning was a good thing."

"Get out!" screamed Stendahl. "You've done your job, now let me alone, you idiot!"

Mr. Bigelow summoned his carpenters and went away.

Mr. Stendahl stood alone before his House.

"Listen here," he said to the unseen rockets. "I came to Mars to get away from you Clean-Minded people, but you're flocking in thicker every day, like flies to offal. So I'm going to show you. I'm going to teach you a fine lesson for what you did to Mr. Poe on Earth. As of this day, beware. The House of Usher is open for business!"

He pushed a fist at the sky.

The rocket landed. A man stepped out jauntily. He glanced at the House, and his gray eyes were displeased and vexed. He strode across the moat to confront the small man there.

"Your name Stendahl?"

"Yes."

"I'm Garrett, Investigator of Moral Climates."

"So you finally got to Mars, you Moral Climate people? I wondered when you'd appear."

"We arrived last week. We'll soon have things as neat and tidy as Earth." The man waved an identification card irritably toward the House. "Suppose you tell me about that place, Stendahl?"

"It's a haunted castle, if you like."

"I don't like, Stendahl, I *don't* like. The sound of that word 'haunted.'"

"Simple enough. In this year of our Lord 2036 I have built a mechanical sanctuary. In it copper bats fly on electronic beams, brass rats scuttle in plastic cellars, robot skeletons dance; robot vampires, harlequins, wolves, and white phantoms, compounded of chemical and ingenuity, live here."

"That's what I was afraid of," said Garrett, smiling quietly. "I'm afraid we're going to have to tear your place down."

"I knew you'd come out as soon as you discovered what went on."

"I'd have come sooner, but we at Moral Climates wanted to be sure of your intentions before we moved in. We can have the Dismantlers and Burning Crew here by supper. By midnight your place will be razed to the cellar. Mr. Stendahl, I consider you somewhat of a fool, sir. Spending hard-earned money on a folly. Why, it must have cost you three million dollars—"

"Four million! But, Mr. Garrett, I inherited twenty-five million when very young. I can afford to throw it about. Seems a dreadful shame, though, to have the House finished only an hour and have you race out with your Dismantlers. Couldn't you possibly let me play with my Toy for just, well, twenty-four hours?"

"You know the law. Strict to the letter. No books, no houses, nothing to be produced which in any way suggests ghosts, vampires, fairies, or any creature of the imagination."

"You'll be burning Babbitts next!"

"You've caused us a lot of trouble, Mr. Stendahl. It's in the record. Twenty years ago. On Earth. You and your library."

"Yes, me and my library. And a few others like me. Oh, Poe's been forgotten for many years now, and Oz and the other creatures. But I had my little cache. We had our libraries, a few private citizens, until you sent your men around with torches and incinerators and tore my fifty thousand books up and burned them. Just as you put a stake through the heart of Halloween and told your film producers that if they made anything at all they would have to make and remake Ernest Hemingway. My God, how many times have I seen *For Whom the Bell Tolls* done! Thirty different versions. All realistic. Oh, realism! Oh, here, oh, now, oh hell!"

"It doesn't pay to be bitter!"

"Mr. Garrett, you must turn in a full report, mustn't you?"

"Yes."

"Then, for curiosity's sake, you'd better come in and look around. It'll take only a minute."

"All right. Lead the way. And no tricks. I've a gun with me."

The door to the House of Usher creaked wide. A moist wind issued forth. There was an immense sighing and moaning, like a subterranean bellows breathing in the lost catacombs.

A rat pranced across the floor stones. Garrett, crying out, gave it a kick. It fell over, the rat did, and from its nylon fur streamed an incredible horde of metal fleas.

"Amazing!" Garrett bent to see.

An old witch sat in a niche, quivering her wax hands over some orange-and-blue tarot cards. She jerked her head and hissed through her toothless mouth at Garrett, tapping her greasy cards.

"Death!" she cried.

"Now *that's* the sort of thing I mean," said Garrett. "Deplorable!"

"I'll let you burn her personally."

"Will you, really?" Garrett was pleased. Then he frowned. "I must say you're taking this all *so* well."

"It was enough just to be able to create this place. To be able to say I did it. To say I nurtured a medieval atmosphere in a modern, incredulous world."

"I've a somewhat reluctant admiration for your genius myself, sir." Garrett watched a mist drift by, whispering and whispering, shaped like a beautiful and nebulous woman. Down a moist corridor a machine whirled. Like the stuff from a cotton-candy centrifuge, mists sprang up and floated, murmuring, in the silent halls.

An ape appeared out of nowhere.

"Hold on!" cried Garrett.

"Don't be afraid." Stendahl tapped the animal's black chest. "A robot. Copper skeleton and all, like the witch. See?" He stroked the fur, and under it metal tubing came to light.

"Yes." Garrett put out a timid hand to pet the thing. "But why, Mr. Stendahl, why all *this*? What obsessed you?"

"Bureaucracy, Mr. Garrett. But I haven't time to explain. The government will discover soon enough." He nodded to the ape. "All right. *Now*."

The ape killed Mr. Garrett.

"Are we almost ready, Pikes?"

Pikes looked up from the table. "Yes, sir."

"You've done a splendid job."

"Well, I'm paid for it, Mr. Stendahl," said Pikes softly as he lifted the plastic eyelid of the robot and inserted the glass eyeball to fasten the rubberoid muscles neatly. "There."

"The spitting image of Mr. Garrett."

"What do we do with him, sir?" Pikes nodded at the slab where the real Mr. Garrett lay dead.

"Better burn him, Pikes. We wouldn't want two Mr. Garretts, would we?"

Pikes wheeled Mr. Garrett to the brick incinerator. "Good-by." He pushed Mr. Garrett in and slammed the door.

Stendahl confronted the robot Garrett. "You have your orders, Garrett?"

"Yes, sir." The robot sat up. "I'm to return to Moral Climates. I'll file a complementary report. Delay action for at least forty-eight hours. Say I'm investigating more fully."

"Right, Garrett. Good-by."

The robot hurried out to Garrett's rocket, got in, and flew away.

Stendahl turned. "Now, Pikes, we send the remainder of the invitations for tonight. I think we'll have a jolly time, don't you?"

"Considering we waited twenty years, quite jolly!"

They winked at each other.

Seven o'clock. Stendahl studied his watch. Almost time. He twirled the sherry glass in his hand. He sat quietly. Above him, among the oaken beams, the bats, their delicate copper bodies hidden under rubber flesh, blinked at him and shrieked. He raised his glass to them. "To our success." Then he leaned back, closed his eyes, and considered the entire affair. How he would savor this in his old age. This paying back of the antiseptic government for its literary terrors and conflagrations. Oh, how the anger and hatred had grown in him through the years. Oh, how the plan had taken a slow shape in his numbed mind, until that day three years ago when he had met Pikes.

Ah yes, Pikes. Pikes with the bitterness in him as deep as a black, charred well of green acid. Who was Pikes? Only the greatest of them all! Pikes, the man of ten thousand faces, a fury, a smoke, a blue fog, a white rain, a bat, a gargoyle, a monster, that was Pikes! Better than Lon Chaney, the father? Stendahl ruminated. Night after night he had watched Chaney in the old, old films. Yes, better than Chaney. Better than that other ancient mummer? What was his name? Karloff? Far better! Lugosi? The comparison was odious! No, there was only one Pikes, and he was a man stripped of his fantasies now, no place on Earth to go, no one to show off to. Forbidden even to perform for himself before a mirror!

Poor impossible, defeated Pikes! How must it have felt, Pikes, the night they seized your films, like entrails yanked from the camera, out of your guts, clutching them in roils and wads to stuff them up a stove to burn away? Did it feel as bad as having some fifty thousand books annihilated with no recompense? Yes. Yes. Stendahl felt his hands grow cold with the senseless anger. So what more natural than they would one day talk over endless coffeepots into innumerable midnights, and out of all the talk and the bitter brewings would come—the House of Usher.

A great church bell rang. The guests were arriving.

Smiling, he went to greet them.

Full grown without memory, the robots waited. In green silks the color of forest pools, in silks the color of frog and fern, they waited. In yellow hair the color of the sun and sand, the robots waited. Oiled, with tube bones cut from bronze and sunk in gelatin, the robots lay. In coffins for the not dead and not alive, in planked boxes, the metronomes waited to be set in motion. There was a smell of lubrication and lathed brass. There was a silence of the tomb yard. Sexed but sexless, the robots. Named but unnamed, and borrowing from humans everything but humanity, the robots stared at the nailed lids of their labeled F.O.B. boxes, in a death that was not even a death, for there had never been a life. And now there was a vast screaming of yanked nails. Now there was a lifting of lids. Now there were shadows on the boxes and the pressure of a hand squirting oil from a can. Now one clock was set in motion, a faint ticking. Now another and another, until this was an immense clock shop, purring. The marble eyes rolled wide their rubber lids. The nostrils winked. The robots, clothed in hair of ape and white of rabbit, arose: Tweedledum following Tweedledee, Mock-Turtle, Dor-

mouse, drowned bodies from the sea compounded of salt and whiteweed, swaying; hanging blue-throated men with turned-up, clam-flesh eyes, and creatures of ice and burning tinsel, loam-dwarfs and pepper-elves, Tik-Tok, Ruggedo, St. Nicholas with a self-made snow flurry blowing on before him, Bluebeard with whiskers like acetylene flame, and sulphur clouds from which green fire snouts protruded, and, in scaly and gigantic serpentine, a dragon with a furnace in its belly reeled out the door with a scream, a tick, a bellow, a silence, a rush, a wind. Ten thousand lids fell back. The clock shop moved out into Usher. The night was enchanted.

A warm breeze came over the land. The guest rockets, burning the sky and turning the weather from autumn to spring, arrived.

The men stepped out in evening clothes and the women stepped out after them, their hair coiffed up in elaborate detail.

"So *that's* Usher!"

"But where's the door?"

At this moment Stendahl appeared. The women laughed and chattered. Mr. Stendahl raised a hand to quiet them. Turning, he looked up to a high castle window and called:

"Rapunzel, Rapunzel, let down your hair."

And from above, a beautiful maiden leaned out upon the night wind and let down her golden hair. And the hair twined and blew and became a ladder upon which the guests might ascend, laughing, into the House.

What eminent sociologists! What clever psychologists! What tremendously important politicians, bacteriologists, and neurologists. There they stood, within the dank walls.

"Welcome, all of you!"

Mr. Tryon, Mr. Owen, Mr. Dunne, Mr. Lang, Mr. Steffens, Mr. Fletcher, and a double-dozen more.

"Come in, come in!"

Miss Gibbs, Miss Pope, Miss Churchil, Miss Blunt, Miss Drummond, and a score of other women, glittering.

Eminent, eminent people, one and all, members of the Society for the Prevention of Fantasy, advocators of the banishment of Halloween and Guy Fawkes, killers of bats, burners of books, bearers of torches; good clean citizens, every one, who had waited until the rough men had come up and buried the Martians and cleansed the cities and built the towns and repaired the highways and made everything safe. And then, with everything well on its way to Safety, the Spoil-Funs, the people with mercurochrome for blood and iodine-colored eyes, came now to set up their Moral Climates and dole out goodness to everyone. And they were his friends! Yes, carefully, carefully, he had met and befriended each of them on Earth in the last year!

"Welcome to the vasty halls of Death!" he cried.

"Hello, Stendahl, what *is* all this?"

"You'll see. Everyone off with their clothes. You'll find booths to one side there. Change into costumes you find there. Men on this side, women on that."

The people stood uneasily about.

"I don't know if we should stay," said Miss Pope. "I don't like the looks of this. It verges on—blasphemy."

"Nonsense, a *costume* ball!"

"Seems quite illegal." Mr. Steffens sniffed about.

"Come off it." Stendahl laughed. "Enjoy yourselves. Tomorrow it'll be a ruin. Get in the booths!"

The House blazed with life and color; harlequins rang by with belled caps and white mice danced miniature quadrilles to the music of dwarfs who tickled tiny fiddles with tiny bows, and flags rippled from scorched beams while bats flew in clouds about gargoyle mouths which spouted down wine, cool, wild, and foaming. A creek wandered through the seven rooms of the masked ball. Guests sipped and found it to be sherry. Guests poured from the booths, transformed from one age into another, their faces covered with dominoes, the very act of putting on a mask revoking all their licenses to pick a quarrel with fantasy and horror. The women swept about in red gowns, laughing. The men danced them attendance. And on the walls were shadows with no people to throw them, and here or there were mirrors in which no image showed. "All of us vampires!" laughed Mr. Fletcher. "Dead!"

There were seven rooms, each a different color, one blue, one purple, one green, one orange, another white, the sixth violet, and the seventh shrouded in black velvet. And in the black room was an ebony clock which struck the hour loud. And through these rooms the guests ran, drunk at last, among the robot fantasies, amid the Dormice and Mad Hatters, the Trolls and Giants, the Black Cats and White Queens, and under their dancing feet the floor gave off the massive pumping beat of a hidden and telltale heart.

"Mr. Stendahl!"

A whisper.

"Mr. Stendahl!"

A monster with the face of Death stood at his elbow. It was Pikes. "I must see you alone."

"What is it?"

"Here." Pikes held out a skeleton hand. In it were a few half-melted, charred wheels, nuts, cogs, bolts. Stendahl looked at them for a long moment. Then he drew Pikes into a corridor. "Garrett?" he whispered.

Pikes nodded. "He sent a robot in his place. Cleaning out the incinerator a moment ago, I found these."

They both stared at the fateful cogs for a time. "This means the police will be here any minute," said Pikes. "Our plan will be ruined."

"I don't know." Stendahl glanced in at the whirling yellow and blue and orange people. The music swept through the misting halls. "I should have guessed Garrett wouldn't be fool enough to come in person. But wait!"

"What's the matter?"

"Nothing. There's nothing the matter. Garrett sent a robot to us. Well, we sent one back. Unless he checks closely, he won't notice the switch."

"Of course!"

"Next time he'll come *himself*. Now that he thinks it's safe. Why, he might be at the door any minute, in *person*! More wine, Pikes!"

The great bell rang.

"There he is now, I'll bet you. Go let Mr. Garrett in."

Rapunzel let down her golden hair.

"Mr. Stendahl?"

"Mr. Garrett. The *real* Mr. Garrett?"

"The same." Garrett eyed the dank walls and the whirling people. "I thought I'd better come see for myself. You can't depend on robots. Other people's robots, especially. I also took the precaution of summoning the Dismantlers. They'll be here in one hour to knock the props out from under this horrible place."

Stendahl bowed. "Thanks for telling me." He waved his hand. "In the meantime, you might as well enjoy this. A little wine?"

"No, thank you. What's going on? How low can a man sink?"

"See for yourself, Mr. Garrett."

"Murder," said Garrett.

"Murder most foul," said Stendahl.

A woman screamed. Miss Pope ran up, her face the color of a cheese. "The most horrid thing just happened! I saw Miss Blunt strangled by an ape and stuffed up a chimney!"

They looked and saw the long yellow hair trailing down from the flue. Garrett cried out.

"Horrid!" sobbed Miss Pope, and then ceased crying. She blinked and turned. "Miss Blunt!"

"Yes," said Miss Blunt, standing there.

"But I just saw you crammed up the flue!"

"No," laughed Miss Blunt. "A robot of myself. A clever facsimile!"

"But, but..."

"Don't cry, darling. I'm quite all right. Let me look at myself. Well, so there I *am*! Up the chimney. Like you said. Isn't that funny?"

Miss Blunt walked away, laughing.

"Have a drink, Garrett?"

"I believe I will. That unnerved me. My God, what a place. This *does* deserve tearing down. For a moment there..."

Garrett drank.

Another scream. Mr. Steffens, borne upon the shoulders of four white rabbits, was carried down a flight of stairs which magically appeared in the floor. Into a pit went Mr. Steffens, where, bound and tied, he was left to face the advancing razor steel of a great pendulum which now whirled down, down, closer and closer to his outraged body.

"Is that me down there?" said Mr. Steffens, appearing at Garrett's elbow. He bent over the pit. "How strange, how odd, to see yourself die."

The pendulum made a final stroke.

"How realistic," said Mr. Steffens, turning away.

"Another drink, Mr. Garrett?"

"Yes, please."

"It won't be long. The Dismantlers will be here."

"Thank God!"

And for a third time, a scream.

"What now?" said Garrett apprehensively.

"It's my turn," said Miss Drummond. "Look."

And a second Miss Drummond, shrieking, was nailed into a coffin and thrust into the raw earth under the floor.

"Why, I remember *that*," gasped the Investigator of Moral Climates. "From the old forbidden books. The Premature Burial. And the others. The Pit, the Pendulum, and the ape, the chimney, the Murders in the Rue Morgue. In a book I burned, yes!"

"Another drink, Garrett. Here, hold your glass steady."

"My lord, you *have* an imagination, haven't you?"

They stood and watched five others die, one in the mouth of a dragon, the others thrown off into the black tarn, sinking and vanishing.

"Would you like to see what we have planned for you?" asked Stendahl.

"Certainly," said Garrett. "What's the difference? We'll blow the whole damn thing up, anyway. You're nasty."

"Come along then. This way."

And he led Garrett down into the floor, through numerous passages and down again upon spiral stairs into the earth, into the catacombs.

"What do you want to show me down here?" said Garrett.

"Yourself killed."

"A duplicate?"

"Yes. And also something else."

"What?"

"The Amontillado," said Stendahl, going ahead with a blazing lantern which he held high. Skeletons froze half out of coffin lids. Garrett held his hand to his nose, his face disgusted.

"The what?"

"Haven't you ever heard of the Amontillado?"

"No!"

"Don't you recognize this?" Stendahl pointed to a cell.

"Should I?"

"Or this?" Stendahl produced a trowel from under his cape smiling.

"What's that thing?"

"Come," said Stendahl.

They stepped into the cell. In the dark, Stendahl affixed the chains to the half-drunken man.

"For God's sake, what are you doing?" shouted Garrett, rattling about.

"I'm being ironic. Don't interrupt a man in the midst of being ironic, it's not polite. There!"

"You've locked me in chains!"

"So I have."

"What are you going to do?"

"Leave you here."

"You're joking."

"A very good joke."

"Where's my duplicate? Don't we see him killed?"

"There is no duplicate."

"But the *others*!"

"The others are dead. The ones you saw killed were the real people. The duplicates, the robots, stood by and watched."

Garrett said nothing.

"Now you're supposed to say, 'For the love of God, Montresor!'" said Stendahl. "And I will reply, 'Yes, for the love of God.' Won't you say it? Come on. *Say* it."

"You fool."

"Must I coax you? Say it. Say 'For the love of God, Montresor!'"

"I won't, you idiot. Get me out of here." He was sober now.

"Here. Put this on." Stendahl tossed in something that belled and rang.

"What is it?"

"A cap and bells. Put it on and I might let you out."

"Stendahl!"

"Put it on, I said!"

Garrett obeyed. The bells tinkled.

"Don't you have a feeling that this has all happened before?" inquired Stendahl, setting to work with trowel and mortar and brick now.

"What're you doing?"

"Walling you in. Here's one row. Here's another."

"You're insane!"

"I won't argue that point."

"You'll be prosecuted for this!"

He tapped a brick and placed it on the wet mortar, humming.

Now there was a thrashing and pounding and a crying out from within the darkening place. The bricks rose higher. "More thrashing, please," said Stendahl. "Let's make it a good show."

"Let me out, let me out!"

There was one last brick to shove into place. The screaming was continuous.

"Garrett?" called Stendahl softly. Garrett silenced himself. "Garrett," said Stendahl, "do you know why I've done this to you? Because you burned Mr. Poe's books without really reading them. You took other people's advice that they needed burning. Otherwise you'd have realized what I was going to do to you when we came down here a moment ago. Ignorance is fatal, Mr. Garrett."

Garrett was silent.

"I want this to be perfect," said Stendahl, holding his lantern up so its light penetrated in upon the slumped figure. "Jingle your bells softly." The bells rustled. "Now, if you'll please say, 'For the love of God, Montresor,' I might let you free."

The man's face came up in the light. There was a hesitation. Then grotesquely the man said, "For the love of God, Montresor."

"Ah," said Stendahl, eyes closed. He shoved the last brick into place and mortared it tight. "*Requiescat in pace*, dear friend."

He hastened from the catacomb.

In the seven rooms the sound of a midnight clock brought everything to a halt.

The Red Death appeared.

Stendahl turned for a moment at the door to watch. And then he ran out of the great House, across the moat to where a helicopter waited.

"Ready, Pikes?"

"Ready."

"There it goes!"

They looked at the great House, smiling. It began to crack down the middle, as with an earthquake, and as Stendahl watched the magnificent sight he heard Pikes reciting behind him in a low, cadenced voice:

"...my brain reeled as I saw the mighty walls rushing asunder—there was a long tumultuous shouting sound like the voice of a thousand waters—and the deep and dank tarn at my feet closed sullenly and silently over the fragments of the House of Usher.'"

The helicopter rose over the steaming lake and flew into the west.

AUGUST 2036:

THE OLD ONES

And what more natural than that, at last, the old people come to Mars, following in the trail left by the loud frontiersmen, the aromatic sophisticates, and the professional travelers and romantic lecturers in search of new grist.

And so the dry and crackling people, the people who spent their time listening to their hearts and feeling their pulses and spooning syrups into their wry mouths, these people who once had taken chair cars to California in November and third-class steamers to Italy in April, the dried-apricot people, the mummy people, came at last to Mars....

SEPTEMBER 2036:

THE MARTIAN

The blue mountains lifted into the rain and the rain fell down into the long canals and old LaFarge and his wife came out of their house to watch.

"First rain this season," LaFarge pointed out.

"It's good," said his wife.

"Very welcome."

They shut the door. Inside, they warmed their hands at a fire. They shivered. In the distance, through the window, they saw rain gleaming on the sides of the rocket which had brought them from Earth.

"There's only one thing," said LaFarge, looking at his hands.

"What's that?" asked his wife.

"I wish we could have brought Tom with us."

"Oh, now, Lafe!"

"I won't start again; I'm sorry."

"We came here to enjoy our old age in peace, not to think of Tom. He's been dead so long now, we should try to forget him and everything on Earth."

"You're right," he said, and turned his hands again to the heat. He gazed into the fire. "I won't speak of it any more. It's just I miss driving out to Green Lawn Park every Sunday to put flowers on his marker. It used to be our only excursion."

The blue rain fell gently upon the house.

At nine o'clock they went to bed and lay quietly, hand in hand, he fifty-five, she sixty, in the raining darkness.

"Anna?" he called softly.

"Yes?" she replied.

"Did you hear something?"

They both listened to the rain and the wind.

"Nothing," she said.

"Someone whistling," he said.

"No, I didn't hear it."

"I'm going to get up to see anyhow."

He put on his robe and walked through the house to the front door. Hesitating, he pulled the door wide, and rain fell cold upon his face. The wind blew.

In the dooryard stood a small figure.

Lightning cracked the sky, and a wash of white color illumined the face looking in at old LaFarge there in the doorway.

"Who's there?" called LaFarge, trembling.

No answer.

"Who is it? What do you want!"

Still not a word.

He felt very weak and tired and numb. "Who are you?" he cried.

His wife entered behind him and took his arm. "Why are you shouting?"

"A small boy's standing in the yard and won't answer me," said the old man, trembling. "He looks like Tom!"

"Come to bed, you're dreaming."

"But he's there; see for yourself."

He pulled the door wider to let her see. The cold wind blew and the thin rain fell upon the soil and the figure stood looking at them with distant eyes. The old woman held to the doorway.

"Go away!" she said, waving one hand. "Go away!"

"Doesn't it look like Tom?" asked the old man.

The figure did not move.

"I'm afraid," said the old woman. "Lock the door and come to bed. I won't have anything to do with it."

She vanished, moaning to herself, into the bedroom. The old man stood with the wind raining coldness on his hands.

'Tom," he called softly. "Tom, if that's you, if by some chance it is you, Tom, I'll leave the door unlatched. And if you're cold and want to come in to warm yourself, just come in later and lie by the hearth; there're some fur rugs there."

He shut but did not lock the door. His wife felt him return to bed, and shuddered. "It's a terrible night. I feel so old," she said, sobbing.

"Hush, hush," he gentled her, and held her in his arms. "Go to sleep."

After a long while she slept.

And then, very quietly, as he listened, he heard the front door open, the rain and wind come in, the door shut. He heard soft footsteps on the hearth and a gentle breathing. "Tom," he said to himself.

Lightning struck in the sky and broke the blackness apart.

In the morning the sun was very hot.

Mr. LaFarge opened the door into the living room and glanced all about, quickly.

The hearthrugs were empty.

LaFarge sighed. "I'm getting old," he said.

He went out to walk to the canal to fetch a bucket of clear water to wash in. At the front door he almost knocked young Tom down carrying in a bucket already filled to the brim. "Good morning, Father!"

"Morning, Tom." The old man fell aside. The young boy, barefooted, hurried across the room, set the bucket down, and turned, smiling. "It's a fine day!"

"Yes, it is," said the old man incredulously. The boy acted as if nothing was unusual. He began to wash his face with the water.

The old man moved forward. "Tom, how did you get here? You're alive?"

"Shouldn't I be?" The boy glanced up.

"But, Tom, Green Lawn Park, every Sunday, the flowers and..." LaFarge had to sit down. The boy came and stood before him and took his hand. The old man felt of the fingers, warm and firm. "You're really here, it's not a dream?"

"You *do* want me to be here, don't you?" The boy seemed worried.

"Yes, yes, Tom!"

"Then why ask questions? Accept me!"

"But your mother; the shock..."

"Don't worry about her. During the night I sang to both of you, and you'll accept me more because of it, especially her. I know what the shock is. Wait till she comes, you'll see." He laughed, shaking his head of coppery, curled hair. His eyes were very blue and clear.

"Good morning, Lafe, Tom." Mother came from the bedroom, putting her hair up into a bun. "Isn't it a fine day?"

Tom turned to laugh in his father's face. "You *see*?"

They ate a very good lunch, all three of them, in the shade behind the house. Mrs. LaFarge had found an old bottle of sunflower wine she had put away, and they all had a drink of that. Mr. LaFarge had never seen his wife's face so bright. If there was any doubt in her mind about Tom, she didn't voice it. It was a completely natural thing to her. And it was also becoming natural to LaFarge himself.

While Mother cleared the dishes LaFarge leaned toward his son and said confidentially, "How old are you now, Son?"

"Don't you know, Father? Fourteen, of course."

"Who are you, *really*? You can't be Tom, but you are *someone*. Who?"

"Don't." Startled, the boy put his hands to his face.

"You can tell me," said the old man. "I'll understand. You're a Martian, aren't you? I've heard tales of the Martians; nothing definite. Stories about how rare Martians are and when they come among us they come as Earth Men. There's something about you—you're Tom and yet you're not."

"Why can't you accept me and stop talking?" cried the boy. His hands completely shielded his face. "Don't doubt, please don't doubt me!" He turned and ran from the table.

"Tom, come back!"

But the boy ran off along the canal toward the distant town.

"Where's Tom going?" asked Anna, returning for more dishes. She looked at her husband's face. "Did you say something to bother him?"

"Anna," he said, taking her hand. "Anna, do you remember anything about Green Lawn Park, a marker, and Tom having pneumonia?"

"What are you talking about?" She laughed.

"Never mind," he said quietly.

In the distance the dust drifted down after Tom had run along the canal rim.

At five in the afternoon, with the sunset, Tom returned. He looked doubtfully at his father. "Are you going to ask me anything?" he wanted to know.

"No questions," said LaFarge.

The boy smiled his white smile. "Swell."

"Where've you been?"

"Near the town. I almost didn't come back. I was almost"—the boy sought for a word—"trapped."

"How do you mean, 'trapped'?"

"I passed a small tin house by the canal and I was almost made so I couldn't come back here ever again to see you. I don't know how to explain it to you, there's no way, I can't tell you, even I don't know; it's strange, I don't want to talk about it."

"We won't then. Better wash up, boy. Suppertime."

The boy ran.

Perhaps ten minutes later a boat floated down the serene surface of the canal, a tall lank man with black hair poling it along with leisurely drives of his arms. "Evening, Brother LaFarge," he said, pausing at his task.

"Evening, Saul, what's the word?"

"All kinds of words tonight. You know that fellow named Nomland who lives down the canal in the tin hut?"

LaFarge stiffened. "Yes?"

"You know what sort of rascal he was?"

"Rumor had it he left Earth because he killed a man."

Saul leaned on his wet pole, gazing at LaFarge. "Remember the name of the man he killed?"

"Gillings, wasn't it?"

"Right. Gillings. Well, about two hours ago Mr. Nomland came running to town crying about how he had seen Gillings, alive, here on Mars, today, this afternoon! He tried to get the jail to lock him up safe. The jail wouldn't. So Nomland went home, and twenty minutes ago, as I get the story, blew his brains out with a gun. I just came from there."

"Well, well," said LaFarge.

"The darnedest things happen," said Saul. "Well, good night, LaFarge."

"Good night."

The boat drifted on down the serene canal waters.

"Supper's hot," called the old woman.

Mr. LaFarge sat down to his supper and, knife in hand, looked over at Tom. "Tom," he said, "what did you do this afternoon?"

"Nothing," said Tom, his mouth full. "Why?"

"Just wanted to know." The old man tucked his napkin in.

At seven that night the old woman wanted to go to town. "Haven't been there in months," she said. But Tom desisted. "I'm afraid of the town," he said. "The people. I don't want to go there."

"Such talk for a grown boy," said Anna. "I won't listen to it. You'll come along. *I* say so."

"Anna, if the boy doesn't want to..." started the old man.

But there was no arguing. She hustled them into the canal-boat and they floated up the canal under the evening stars, Tom lying on his back, his eyes closed; asleep or not, there was no telling. The old man looked at him steadily, wondering. Who is this, he thought, in need of love as much as we? Who is he and what is he that, out of loneliness, he comes into the alien camp and assumes the voice and face of memory and stands among us, accepted and happy at last? From what mountain, what cave, what small last race of people remaining on this world when the rockets came from Earth? The old man shook his head. There was no way to know. This, to all purposes, was Tom.

The old man looked at the town ahead and did not like it, but then he returned to thoughts of Tom and Anna again and he thought to himself: Perhaps this is wrong to keep Tom but a little while, when nothing can come of it but trouble and sorrow, but how are we to give up the very thing we've wanted, no matter if it stays only a day and is gone, making the emptiness emptier, the dark nights darker, the rainy nights wetter? You might as well force the food from our mouths as take this one from us.

And he looked at the boy slumbering so peacefully at the bottom of the boat. The boy whimpered with some dream. "The people," he murmured in his sleep. "Changing and changing. The trap."

"There, there, boy." LaFarge stroked the boy's soft curls and Tom ceased.

LaFarge helped wife and son from the boat.

"Here we are!" Anna smiled at all the lights, listening to the music from the drinking houses, the pianos, the phonographs, watching people, arm in arm, striding by in the crowded streets.

"I wish I was home," said Tom.

"You never talked that way before," said the mother. "You always liked Saturday nights in town."

"Stay close to me," whispered Tom. "I don't want to get trapped."

Anna overheard. "Stop talking that way; come along!"

LaFarge noticed that the boy held his hand. LaFarge squeezed it. "I'll stick with you, Tommy-boy." He looked at the throngs coming and going, and it worried him also. "We won't stay long."

"Nonsense, we'll spend the evening," said Anna.

They crossed a street, and three drunken men careened into them. There was much confusion, a separation, a wheeling about, and then LaFarge stood stunned.

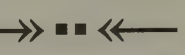
Tom was gone.

"Where is he?" asked Anna irritably. "Him always running off alone any chance he gets. Tom!" she called.

Mr. LaFarge hurried through the crowd, but Tom was gone.

"He'll come back; he'll be at the boat when we leave," said Anna certainly, steering her husband back toward the motion-picture theater. There was a sudden commotion in the crowd, and a man and woman rushed by LaFarge. He recognized them. Joe Spaulding and his wife. They were gone before he could speak to them.

Looking back anxiously, he purchased the tickets for the theater and allowed his wife to draw him into the unwelcome darkness.



Tom was not at the landing at eleven o'clock. Mrs. LaFarge turned very pale.

"Now, Mother," said LaFarge, "don't worry. I'll find him. Wait here."

"Hurry back." Her voice faded into the ripple of the water.

He walked through the night streets, hands in pockets. All about, lights were going out one by one. A few people were still leaning out their windows, for the night was warm, even though the sky still held storm clouds from time to time among the stars. As he walked he recalled the boy's constant references to being trapped, his fear of crowds and cities. There was no sense in it, thought the old man tiredly. Perhaps the boy was gone forever, perhaps he had never been. LaFarge turned in at a particular alley, watching the numbers.

"Hello there, LaFarge."

A man sat in his doorway, smoking a pipe.

"Hello, Mike."

"You and your woman quarrel? You out walking it off?"

"No. Just walking."

"You look like you lost something. Speaking of lost things," said Mike, "somebody got found this evening. You know Joe Spaulding? You remember his daughter Lavinia?"

"Yes." LaFarge was cold. It all seemed a repeated dream. He knew which words would come next.

"Lavinia came home tonight," said Mike, smoking. "You recall, she was lost on the dead sea bottoms about a month ago? They found what they thought was her body, badly deteriorated, and ever since the Spaulding family's been no good. Joe went around saying she wasn't dead, that wasn't really her body. Guess he was right. Tonight Lavinia showed up."

"Where?" LaFarge felt his breath come swiftly, his heart pounding.

"On Main Street. The Spauldings were buying tickets for a show. And there, all of a sudden, in the crowd, was Lavinia. Must have been quite a scene. She didn't know them first off. They followed her half down a street and spoke to her. Then she remembered."

"Did you see her?"

"No, but I heard her singing. Remember how she used to sing 'The Bonnie Banks of Loch Lomond'? I heard her trilling out for her father a while ago over there in their

house. It was good to hear; her such a beautiful girl. A shame, I thought, her dead; and now with her back again it's fine. Here now, you look weak yourself. Better come in for a spot of whisky...."

"Thanks, no, Mike." The old man moved away. He heard Mike say good night and did not answer, but fixed his eyes upon the two-story building where rambling clusters of crimson Martian flowers lay upon the high crystal roof. Around back, above the garden, was a twisted iron balcony, and the windows above were lighted. It was very late, and still he thought to himself: What will happen to Anna if I don't bring Tom home with me? This second shock, this second death, what will it do to her? Will she remember the first death, too, and this dream, and the sudden vanishing? Oh God, I've got to find Tom, or what will come of Anna? Poor Anna, waiting there at the landing. He paused and lifted his head. Somewhere above, voices bade other soft voices good night, doors turned and shut, lights dimmed, and a gentle singing continued. A moment later a girl no more than eighteen, very lovely, came out upon the balcony.

LaFarge called up through the wind that was blowing.

The girl turned and looked down. "Who's there?" she cried.

"It's me," said the old man, and, realizing this reply to be silly and strange, fell silent, his lips working. Should he call out, "Tom, my son, this is your father"? How to speak to her? She would think him quite insane and summon her parents.

The girl bent forward in the blowing light. "I know you," she replied softly. "Please go; there's nothing you can do."

"You've got to come back!" It escaped LaFarge before he could prevent it.

The moonlit figure above drew into shadow, so there was no identity, only a voice. "I'm not your son any more," it said. "We should never have come to town."

"Anna's waiting at the landing!"

"I'm sorry," said the quiet voice. "But what can I do? I'm happy here, I'm loved, even as you loved me. I am what I am, and I take what can be taken; it's too late now, they've caught me."

"But Anna, the shock to her. Think of that."

"The thoughts are too strong in this house; it's like being imprisoned. I can't change myself back."

"You are Tom, you *were* Tom, weren't you? You aren't joking with an old man; you're not really Lavinia Spaulding?"

"I'm not anyone, I'm just myself; wherever I am, I am something, and now I'm something you can't help."

"You're not safe in the town. It's better out on the canal where no one can hurt you," pleaded the old man.

"That's true." The voice hesitated. "But I must consider these people now. How would they feel if, in the morning, I was gone again, this time for good? Anyway, the mother knows what I am; she guessed, even as you did. I think they all guessed but didn't question. You don't question Providence. If you can't have the reality, a dream is just as good. Perhaps I'm not their dead one back, but I'm something almost better to them; an ideal shaped by their minds. I have a choice of hurting them or your wife."

"They're a family of five. They can stand your loss better!"

"Please," said the voice. "I'm tired."

The old man's voice hardened. "You've got to come. I can't let Anna be hurt again. You're our son. You're my son, and you belong to us."

"No, please!" The shadow trembled.

"You don't belong to this house or these people!"

"No, don't do this to me!"

"Tom, Tom, Son, listen to me. Come back, slip down the vines, boy. Come along, Anna's waiting; we'll give you a good home, everything you want." He stared and stared upward, willing it to be.

The shadows drifted, the vines rustled.

At last the quiet voice said, "All right, Father."

"Tom!"

In the moonlight the quick figure of a boy slid down through the vines. LaFarge put up his arms to catch him.

The room lights above flashed on. A voice issued from one of the grilled windows. "Who's down there?"

"Hurry, boy!"

More lights, more voices. "Stop, I have a gun! Vinny, are you all right?" A running of feet.

Together the old man and the boy ran across the garden.

A shot sounded. The bullet struck the wall as they slammed the gate.

"Tom, you go that way; I'll go here and lead them off! Run to the canal; I'll meet you there in ten minutes, boy!"

They parted.

The moon hid behind a cloud. The old man ran in darkness.

"Anna, I'm here!"

The old woman helped him, trembling, into the boat. "Where's Tom?"

"He'll be here in a minute," panted LaFarge.

They turned to watch the alleys and the sleeping town. Late strollers were still out: a policeman, a night watchman, a rocket pilot, several lonely men coming home from some nocturnal rendezvous, four men and women issuing from a bar, laughing. Music played dimly somewhere.

"Why doesn't he come?" asked the old woman.

"He'll come, he'll come." But LaFarge was not certain. Suppose the boy had been caught again, somehow, someway, in his travel down to the landing, running through the midnight streets between the dark houses. It was a long run, even for a young boy. But he should have reached here first.

And now, far away, along the moonlit avenue, a figure ran.

LaFarge cried out and then silenced himself, for also far away was another sound of voices and running feet. Lights blazed on in window after window. Across the open plaza leading to the landing, the one figure ran. It was not Tom; it was only a running shape with a face like silver shining in the light of the globes clustered about the plaza. And as it rushed nearer, nearer, it became more familiar, until when it reached

the landing it was Tom! Anna flung up her hands. LaFarge hurried to cast off. But already it was too late.

For out of the avenue and across the silent plaza now came one man, another, a woman, two other men, Mr. Spaulding, all running. They stopped, bewildered. They stared about, wanting to go back because this could be only a nightmare, it was quite insane. But they came on again, hesitantly, stopping, starting.

It was too late. The night, the event, was over. LaFarge twisted the mooring rope in his fingers. He was very cold and lonely. The people raised and put down their feet in the moonlight, drifting with great speed, wide-eyed, until the crowd, all ten of them, halted at the landing. They peered wildly down into the boat. They cried out.

"Don't move, LaFarge!" Spaulding had a gun.

And now it was evident what had happened. Tom flashing through the moonlit streets, alone, passing people. A policeman seeing the figure dart past. The policeman pivoting, staring at the face, calling a name, giving pursuit. "*You*, stop!" Seeing a criminal face. All along the way, the same thing, men here, women there, night watchmen, rocket pilots. The swift figure meaning everything to them, all identities, all persons, all names. How many different names had been uttered in the last five minutes? How many different faces shaped over Tom's face, all wrong?

All down the way the pursued and the pursuing, the dream and the dreamers, the quarry and the hounds. All down the way the sudden revealment, the flash of familiar eyes, the cry of an old, old name, the remembrances of other times, the crowd multiplying. Everyone leaping forward as, like an image reflected from ten thousand mirrors, ten thousand eyes, the running dream came and went, a different face to those ahead, those behind, those yet to be met, those unseen.

And here they all are now, at the boat, wanting the dream for their own, just as we want him to be Tom, not Lavinia or William or Roger or any other, thought LaFarge. But it's all done now. The thing has gone too far.

"Come up, all of you!" Spaulding ordered them.

Tom stepped up from the boat. Spaulding seized his wrist. "You're coming home with me. I *know*."

"Wait," said the policeman. "He's my prisoner. Name's Dexter; wanted for murder."

"No!" a woman sobbed. "It's my husband! I guess I know my husband!"

Other voices objected. The crowd moved in.

Mrs. LaFarge shielded Tom. "This is my son; you have no right to accuse him of anything. We're going home right now!"

As for Tom, he was trembling and shaking violently. He looked very sick. The crowd thickened about him, putting out their wild hands, seizing and demanding.

Tom screamed.

Before their eyes he changed. He was Tom and James and a man named Switchman, another named Butterfield; he was the town mayor and the young girl Judith and the husband William and the wife Clarisse. He was melting wax shaping to their minds. They shouted, they pressed forward, pleading. He screamed, threw out his hands, his face dissolving to each demand. "Tom!" cried LaFarge. "Alice!" another.

"William!" They snatched his wrists, whirled him about, until with one last shriek of horror he fell.

He lay on the stones, melted wax cooling, his face all faces, one eye blue, the other golden, hair that was brown, red, yellow, black, one eyebrow thick, one thin, one hand large, one small.

They stood over him and put their fingers to their mouths. They bent down.

"He's dead," someone said at last.

It began to rain.

The rain fell upon the people, and they looked up at the sky.

Slowly, and then more quickly, they turned and walked away and then started running, scattering from the scene. In a minute the place was desolate. Only Mr. and Mrs. LaFarge remained, looking down, hand in hand, terrified.

The rain fell upon the upturned, unrecognizable face.

Anna said nothing but began to cry.

"Come along home, Anna, there's nothing we can do," said the old man.

They climbed down into the boat and went back along the canal in the darkness. They entered their house and lit a small fire and warmed their hands. They went to bed and lay together, cold and thin, listening to the rain returned to the roof above them.

"Listen," said LaFarge at midnight. "Did you hear something?"

"Nothing, nothing."

"I'll go look anyway."

He fumbled across the dark room and waited by the outer door for a long time before he opened it.

He pulled the door wide and looked out.

Rain poured from the black sky upon the empty dooryard, into the canal and among the blue mountains.

He waited five minutes and then softly, his hands wet, he shut and bolted the door.

NOVEMBER 2036:

THE LUGGAGE STORE

It was a very remote thing, when the luggage-store proprietor heard the news on the night radio, received all the way from Earth on a light-sound beam. The proprietor felt how remote it was.

There was going to be a war on Earth.

He went out to peer into the sky.

Yes, there it was. Earth, in the evening heavens, following the sun into the hills. The words on the radio and that green star were one and the same.

"I don't believe it," said the proprietor.

"It's because you're not there," said Father Peregrine, who had stopped by to pass the time of evening.

"What do you mean, Father?"

"It's like when I was a boy," said Father Peregrine. "We heard about wars in China. But we never believed them. It was too far away. And there were too many people dying. It was impossible. Even when we saw the motion pictures we didn't believe it. Well, that's how it is now. Earth is China. It's so far away it's unbelievable. It's not here. You can't touch it. You can't even see it. All you see is a green light. Two billion people living on that light? Unbelievable! War? We don't hear the explosions."

"We will," said the proprietor. "I keep thinking about all those people that were going to come to Mars this week. What was it? A hundred thousand or so coming up in the next month or so. What about *them* if the war starts?"

"I imagine they'll turn back. They'll be needed on Earth."

"Well," said the proprietor, "I'd better get my luggage dusted off. I got a feeling there'll be a rush sale here any time."

"Do you think everyone now on Mars will go back to Earth if this *is* the Big War we've all been expecting for years?"

"It's a funny thing, Father, but yes, I think we'll all go back. I know, we came up here to get away from things—politics, the atom bomb, war, pressure groups, prejudice, laws—I know. But it's still home there. You wait and see. When the first bomb drops on America the people up here'll start thinking. They haven't been here long enough. A couple years is all. If they'd been here forty years, it'd be different, but they got relatives down there, and their home towns. Me, I can't believe in Earth any more; I can't imagine it much. But I'm old. I don't count. I might stay on here."

"I doubt it."

"Yes, I guess you're right."

They stood on the porch watching the stars. Finally Father Peregrine pulled some money from his pocket and handed it to the proprietor. "Come to think of it, you'd better give me a new valise. My old one's in pretty bad condition...."

NOVEMBER 2036:

THE OFF SEASON

Sam Parkhill motioned with the broom, sweeping away the blue Martian sand.

"Here we are," he said. "Yes, sir, look at that!" He pointed. "Look at that sign. SAM'S HOT DOGS! Ain't that beautiful, Elma?"

"Sure, Sam," said his wife.

"Boy, what a change for me. If the boys from the Fourth Expedition could see me now. Am I glad to be in business myself while all the rest of them guys're off soldiering around still. We'll make thousands, Elma, thousands."

His wife looked at him for a long time, not speaking. "Whatever happened to Captain Wilder?" she asked finally. "That captain that killed that guy who thought he was going to kill off every other Earth Man, what was his name?"

"Spender, that nut. He was too damn particular. Oh, Captain Wilder? He's off on a rocket to Jupiter, I hear. They kicked him upstairs. I think he was a little batty abouts Mars too. Touchy, you know. He'll be back down from Jupiter and Pluto in about twenty years if he's lucky. That's what he gets for shooting off his mouth. And while he's freezing to death, look at me, look at this place!"

This was a crossroads where two dead highways came and went in darkness. Here Sam Parkhill had flung up this riveted aluminum structure, garish with white light, trembling with juke-box melody.

He stooped to fix a border of broken glass he had placed on the footpath. He had broken the glass from some old Martian buildings in the hills. "Best hot dogs on two worlds! First man on Mars with a hot-dog stand! The best onions and chili and mustard! You can't say I'm not alert. Here's the main highways, over there is the dead city and the mineral deposits. Those trucks from Earth Settlement 101 will have to pass here twenty-four hours a day! Do I know my locations, or don't I?"

His wife looked at her fingernails.

"You think those ten thousand new-type work rockets will come through to Mars?" she said at last.

"In a month," he said loudly. "Why you look so funny?"

"I don't trust those Earth people," she said. "I'll believe it when I see them ten thousand rockets arrive with the one hundred thousand Mexicans and Chinese on them."

"Customers." He lingered on the word. "One hundred thousand hungry people."

"If," said his wife slowly, watching the sky, "there's no atomic war. I don't trust no atom bombs. There's so many of them on Earth now, you never can tell."

"Ah," said Sam, and went on sweeping.

From the comers of his eyes he caught a blue flicker. Something floated in the air gently behind him. He heard his wife say, "Sam. A friend of yours to see you."

Sam whirled to see the mask seemingly floating in the wind.

"So you're back again!" And Sam held his broom like a weapon.

The mask nodded. It was cut from pale blue glass and was fitted above a thin neck, under which were blowing loose robes of thin yellow silk. From the silk two mesh silver hands appeared. The mask mouth was a slot from which musical sounds issued now as the robes, the mask, the hands increased to a height, decreased.

"Mr. Parkhill, I've come back to speak to you again," the voice said from behind the mask.

"I thought I told you I don't want you near here!" cried Sam. "Go on, I'll give you the Disease!"

"I've already had the Disease," said the voice. "I was one of the few survivors. I was sick a long time."

"Go on and hide in the hills, that's where you belong, that's where you've been. Why you come on down and bother me? Now, all of a sudden. Twice in one day."

"We mean you no harm."

"But I mean you harm!" said Sam, backing up. "I don't like strangers. I don't like Martians. I never seen one before. It ain't natural. All these years you guys hide, and all of a sudden you pick on me. Leave me alone."

"We come for an important reason," said the blue mask.

"If it's about this land, it's mine. I built this hot-dog stand with my own hands."

"In a way it *is* about the land."

"Look here," said Sam. "I'm from New York City. Where I come from there's ten million others just like me. You Martians are a couple dozen left, got no cities, you wander around in the hills, no leaders, no laws, and now you come tell me about this land. Well, the old got to give way to the new. That's the law of give and take. I got a gun here. After you left this morning I got it out and loaded it."

"We Martians are telepathic," said the cold blue mask. "We are in contact with one of your towns across the dead sea. Have you listened on your radio?"

"My radio's busted."

"Then you don't know. There's big news. It concerns Earth—"

A silver hand gestured. A bronze tube appeared in it.

"Let me show you this."

"A gun," cried Sam Parkhill.

An instant later he had yanked his own gun from his hip holster and fired into the mist, the robe, the blue mask.

The mask sustained itself a moment. Then, like a small circus tent pulling up its stakes and dropping soft fold on fold, the silks rustled, the mask descended, the silver claws tinkled on the stone path. The mask lay on a small huddle of silent white bones and material.

Sam stood gasping.

His wife swayed over the huddled pile.

"That's no weapon," she said, bending down. She picked up the bronze tube. "He was going to show you a message. It's all written out in snake-script, all the blue snakes. I can't read it. Can you?"

"No, that Martian picture writing, it wasn't anything. Let it go!" Sam glanced hastily around. "There may be others! We've got to get him out of sight. Get the shovel!"

"What're you going to do?"

"Bury him, of course!"

"You shouldn't have shot him."

"It was a mistake. Quick!"

Silently she fetched him the shovel.

At eight o'clock he was back sweeping the front of the hot-dog stand self-consciously. His wife stood, arms folded, in the bright doorway.

"I'm sorry what happened," he said. He looked at her, then away. "You know it was purely the circumstances of Fate."

'Yes," said his wife.

"I hated like hell to see him take out that weapon."

"What weapon?"

"Well, I thought it was one! I'm sorry, I'm sorry! How many times do I say it!"

"Ssh," said Elma, putting one finger to her lips. "Ssh."

"I don't care," he said. "I got the whole Earth Settlements, Inc., back of me!" He snorted. "These Martians won't dare—"

"Look," said Elma.

He looked out onto the dead sea bottom. He dropped his broom. He picked it up and his mouth was open, a little free drop of saliva flew on the air, and he was suddenly shivering.

"Elma, Elma, Elma!" he said.

"Here they come," said Elma.

Across the ancient sea floor a dozen tall, blue-sailed Martian sand ships floated, like blue ghosts, like blue smoke.

"Sand ships! But there aren't any more, Elma, no more sand ships."

"Those seem to be sand ships," she said.

"But the authorities confiscated all of them! They broke them up, sold some at auction! I'm the only one in this whole damn territory's got one and knows how to run one."

"Not any more," she said, nodding at the sea.

"Come on, let's get out of here!"

"Why?" she asked slowly, fascinated with the Martian vessels.

"They'll kill me! Get in our truck, quick!"

Elma didn't move.

He had to drag her around back of the stand where the two machines stood, his truck, which he had used steadily until a month ago, and the old Martian sand ship which he had bid for at auction, smiling, and which, during the last three weeks, he had used to carry supplies back and forth over the glassy sea floor. He looked at his

truck now and remembered. The engine was out on the ground; he had been puttering with it for two days.

"The truck don't seem to be in running condition," said Elma.

"The sand ship. Get in!"

"And let you drive me in a sand ship? Oh no."

"Get in! I can do it!"

He shoved her in, jumped in behind her, and flapped the tiller, let the cobalt sail up to take the evening wind.

The stars were bright and the blue Martian ships were skimming across the whispering sands. At first his own ship would not move, then he remembered the sand anchor and yanked it in.

"There!"

The wind hurled the sand ship keening over the dead sea bottom, over long-buried crystals, past upended pillars, past deserted docks of marble and brass, past dead white chess cities, past purple foothills, into distance. The figures of the Martian ships receded and then began to pace Sam's ship.

"Guess I showed them, by God!" cried Sam. "I'll report to the Rocket Corporation. They'll give me protection! I'm pretty quick."

"They could have stopped you if they wanted," Elma said tiredly. "They just didn't bother."

He laughed. "Come off it. Why should they let me get off? No, they weren't quick enough, is all."

"Weren't they?" Elma nodded behind him.

He did not turn. He felt a cold wind blowing. He was afraid to turn. He felt something in the seat behind him, something as frail as your breath on a cold morning, something as blue as hickory-wood smoke at twilight, something like old white lace, something like a snowfall, something like the icy rime of winter on the brittle sedge.

There was a sound as of a thin plate of glass broken—laughter. Then silence. He turned.

The young woman sat at the tiller bench quietly. Her wrists were thin as icicles, her eyes as clear as the moons and as large, steady and white. The wind blew at her and, like an image on cold water, she rippled, silk standing out from her frail body in tatters of blue rain.

"Go back," she said.

"No." Sam was quivering, the fine, delicate fear-quivering of a hornet suspended in the air, undecided between fear and hate. "Get off my ship!"

"This isn't your ship," said the vision. "It's old as our world. It sailed the sand seas ten thousand years ago when the seas were whispered away and the docks were empty, and you came and took it, stole it. Now turn it around, go back to the crossroad place. We have need to talk with you. Something important has happened."

"Get off my ship!" said Sam. He took a gun from his holster with a creak of leather. He pointed it carefully. "Jump off before I count three or—"

"Don't!" cried the girl. "I won't hurt you. Neither will the others. We came in peace!"

"One," said Sam.

"Sam!" said Elma.

"Listen to me," said the girl.

"Two," said Sam firmly, cocking the gun trigger.

"Sam!" cried Elma.

"Three," said Sam.

"We only—" said the girl.

The gun went off.

In the sunlight, snow melts, crystals evaporate into a steam, into nothing. In the firelight, vapors dance and vanish. In the core of a volcano, fragile things burst and disappear. The girl, in the gunfire, in the heat, in the concussion, folded like a soft scarf, melted like a crystal figurine. What was left of her, ice, snowflake, smoke, blew away in the wind. The tiller seat was empty.

Sam holstered his gun and did not look at his wife.

"Sam," she said after a minute more of traveling, whispering over the moon-colored sea of sand, "stop the ship."

He looked at her and his face was pale. "No, you don't. Not after all this time, you're not pulling out on me."

She looked at his hand on his gun. "I believe you would," she said. "You actually would."

He jerked his head from side to side, hand tight on the tiller bar. "Elma, this is crazy. We'll be in town in a minute, we'll be okay!"

"Yes," said his wife, lying back cold in the ship.

"Elma, listen to me."

"There's nothing to hear, Sam."

"Elma!"

They were passing a little white chess city, and in his frustration, in his rage, he sent six bullets crashing among the crystal towers. The city dissolved in a shower of ancient glass and splintered quartz. It fell away like carved soap, shattered. It was no more. He laughed and fired again, and one last tower, one last chess piece, took fire, ignited, and in blue flinders went up to the stars.

"I'll show them! I'll show everybody!"

"Go ahead, show us, Sam." She lay in the shadows.

"Here comes another city!" Sam reloaded his gun. "Watch me fix it!"

The blue phantom ships loomed up behind them, drawing steadily apace. He did not see them at first. He was only aware of a whistling and a high windy screaming, as of steel on sand, and it was the sound of the sharp razor prows of the sand ships preening the sea bottoms, their red pennants, blue pennants unfurled. In the blue light ships were blue dark images, masked men, men with silvery faces, men with blue stars for eyes, men with carved golden ears, men with tinfoil cheeks and ruby-studded lips, men with arms folded, men following him, Martian men.

One, two, three. Sam counted. The Martian ships closed in.

"Elma, Elma, I can't hold them all off!"

Elma did not speak or rise from where she had slumped.

Sam fired his gun eight times. One of the sand ships fell apart, the sail, the emerald body, the bronze hull points, the moon-white tiller, and all the separate images in it. The masked men, all of them, dug into the sand and separated out into orange and then smoke-flame.

But the other ships closed in.

"I'm outnumbered, Elma!" he cried. "They'll kill me!"

He threw out the anchor. It was no use. The sail fluttered down, folding unto itself, sighing. The ship stopped. The wind stopped. Travel stopped. Mars stood still as the majestic vessels of the Martians drew around and hesitated over him.

"Earth Man," a voice called from a high seat somewhere. A silverine mask moved. Ruby-rimmed lips glittered with the words.

"I didn't do anything!" Sam looked at all the faces, one hundred in all, that surrounded him. There weren't many Martians left on Mars—one hundred, one hundred and fifty, all told. And most of them were here now, on the dead seas, in their resurrected ships, by their dead chess cities, one of which had just fallen like some fragile vase hit by a pebble. The silverine masks glinted.

"It was all a mistake," he pleaded, standing out of his ship, his wife slumped behind him in the deeps of the hold, like a dead woman. "I came to Mars like any honest enterprising businessman. I took some surplus material from a rocket that crashed and I built me the finest little stand you ever saw right there on that land by the crossroads—you know where it is. You've got to admit it's a good job of building." Sam laughed, staring around. "And that Martian—I know he was a friend of yours—came. His death was an accident, I assure you. All I wanted to do was have a hot-dog stand, the only one on Mars, the first and most important one. You understand how it is? I was going to serve the best darned hot dogs there, with chili and onions and orange juice."

The silver masks did not move. They burned in the moonlight. Yellow eyes shone upon Sam. He felt his stomach clench in, wither, become a rock. He threw his gun in the sand.

"I give up."

"Pick up your gun," said the Martians in chorus.

"What?"

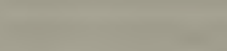
"Your gun." A jeweled hand waved from the prow of a blue ship. "Pick it up. Put it away."

Unbelieving, he picked up the gun.

"Now," said the voice, "turn your ship and go back to your stand."

"Now?"

"Now," said the voice. "We will not harm you. You ran away before we were able to explain. Come."



Now the great ships turned as lightly as moon thistles. Their wing-sails flapped with a sound of soft applause on the air. The masks were coruscating, turning, firing the shadows.

"Elma!" Sam tumbled into the ship. "Get up, Elma. We're going back." He was excited. He almost gibbered with relief. "They aren't going to hurt me, kill me, Elma. Get up, honey, get up."

"What—what?" Elma blinked around and slowly, as the ship was sent into the wind again, she helped herself, as in a dream, back up to a seat and slumped there like a sack of stones, saying no more.

The sand slid under the ship. In half an hour they were back at the crossroads, the ships planted, all of them out of the ships.

The Leader stood before Sam and Elma, his mask beaten of polished bronze, the eyes only empty slits of endless blue-black, the mouth a slot out of which words drifted into the wind.

"Ready your stand," said the voice. A diamond-gloved hand waved. "Prepare the viands, prepare the foods, prepare the strange wines, for tonight is indeed a great night!"

"You mean," said Sam, "you'll let me stay on here?"

"Yes."

"You're not mad at me?"

The mask was rigid and carved and cold and sightless.

"Prepare your place of food," said the voice softly. "And take this."

"What is it?" Sam blinked at the silver-foil scroll that was handed him, upon which, in hieroglyph, snake figures danced.

"It is the land grant to all of the territory from the silver mountains to the blue hills, from the dead salt sea there to the distant valleys of moonstone and emerald," said the Leader.

"M-mine?" said Sam, incredulous.

"Yours."

"One hundred thousand miles of territory?"

"Yours."

"Did you hear that, Elma?"

Elma was sitting on the ground, leaning against the aluminum hot-dog stand, eyes shut.

"But why, why—why are you giving me all this?" asked Sam, trying to look into the metal slots of the eyes.

"That is not all. Here." Six other scrolls were produced. The names were declared, the territories announced.

"Why, that's half of Mars! I own half of Mars!" Sam rattled the scrolls in his fists. He shook them at Elma, insane with laughing. "Elma, did you hear?"

"I heard," said Elma, looking at the sky.

She seemed to be watching for something. She was becoming a little more alert now. "Thank you, oh, thank you," said Sam to the bronze mask.

"Tonight is the night," said the mask. "You must be ready."

"I will be. What is it—a surprise? Are the rockets coming through earlier than we thought, a month earlier from Earth? All ten thousand rockets, bringing the settlers, the miners, the workers and their wives, all hundred thousand of them? Won't that be swell, Elma? You see, I told you. I told you, that town there won't always have just

one thousand people in it. There'll be fifty thousand more coming, and the month after that a hundred thousand more, and by the end of the year five million Earth Men. And me with the only hot-dog stand staked out on the busiest highway to the mines!"

The mask floated on the wind. "We leave you. Prepare. The land is yours."

In the blowing moonlight, like metal petals of some ancient flower, like blue plumes, like cobalt butterflies immense and quiet, the old ships turned and moved over the shifting sands, the masks beaming and glittering, until the last shine, the last blue color, was lost among the hills.

"Elma, why did they do it? Why didn't they kill me? Don't they know anything? What's wrong with them? Elma, do you understand?" He shook her shoulder. "I own half of Mars!"

She watched the night sky, waiting.

"Come on," he said. "We've got to get the place fixed. All the hot dogs boiling, the buns warm, the chili cooking, the onions peeled and diced, the relish laid out, the napkins in the clips, the place spotless! Hey!" He did a little wild dance, kicking his heels. "Oh boy, I'm happy; yes, sir, I'm happy," he sang, off key. "This is my lucky day!"

He boiled the hot dogs, cut the buns, sliced the onions in a frenzy.

"Just think, that Martian said a surprise. That can only mean one thing, Elma. Those hundred thousand people coming in ahead of schedule, tonight, of all nights! We'll be flooded! We'll work long hours for days, what with tourists riding around seeing things, Elma. Think of the money!"

He went out and looked at the sky. He didn't see anything.

"In a minute, maybe," he said, snuffing the cool air gratefully, arms up, beating his chest. "Ah!"

Elma said nothing. She peeled potatoes for French fries quietly, her eyes always on the sky.

"Sam," she said half an hour later. "There it is. Look."

He looked and saw it.

Earth.

It rose full and green, like a fine-cut stone, above the hills.

"Good old Earth," he whispered lovingly. "Good old wonderful Earth. Send me your hungry and your starved. Something, something—how does that poem go? Send me your hungry, old Earth. Here's Sam Parkhill, his hot dogs all boiled, his chili cooking, everything neat as a pin. Come on, you Earth, send me your rockets!"

He went out to look at his place. There it sat, perfect as a fresh-laid egg on the dead sea bottom, the only nucleus of light and warmth in hundreds of miles of lonely wasteland. It was like a heart beating alone in a great dark body. He felt almost sorrowful with pride, gazing at it with wet eyes.

"It sure makes you humble," he said among the cooking odors of wieners, warm buns, rich butter. "Step up," he invited the various stars in the sky. "Who'll be the first to buy?"

"Sam," said Elma.

Earth changed in the black sky.

It caught fire.

Part of it seemed to come apart in a million pieces, as if a gigantic jigsaw had exploded. It burned with an unholy dripping glare for a minute, three times normal size, then dwindled.

"What was that?" Sam looked at the green fire in the sky.

"Earth," said Elma, holding her hands together.

"That can't be Earth, that's not Earth! No, that ain't Earth! It can't be."

"You mean it couldn't be Earth," said Elma, looking at him. "That just isn't Earth. No, that's not Earth; is that what you mean?"

"Not Earth—oh no, it *couldn't* be," he wailed. He stood there, his hands at his sides, his mouth open, his eyes wide and dull, not moving.

"Sam." She called his name. For the first time in days her eyes were bright. "Sam?"

He looked up at the sky.

"Well," she said. She glanced around for a minute or so in silence. Then briskly she flapped a wet towel over her arm. "Switch on more lights, turn up the music, open the doors. There'll be another batch of customers along in about a million years. Gotta be ready, yes, sir."

Sam did not move.

"What a swell spot for a hot-dog stand," she said. She reached over and picked a toothpick out of a jar and put it between her front teeth. "Let you in on a little secret, Sam," she whispered, leaning toward him. "This looks like it's going to be an off season."

THE WATCHERS

They all came out and looked at the sky that night. They left their suppers or their washing up or their dressing for the show and they came out upon their now-not-quite-as-new porches and watched the green star of Earth there. It was a move without conscious effort; they all did it, to help them understand the news they had heard on the radio a moment before. There was Earth and there the coming war, and there hundreds of thousands of mothers or grandmothers or fathers or brothers or aunts or uncles or cousins. They stood on the porches and tried to believe in the existence of Earth, much as they had once tried to believe in the existence of Mars; it was a problem reversed. To all intents and purposes, Earth now was dead; they had been away from it for three or four years. Space was an anesthetic; seventy million miles of space numbed you, put memory to sleep, depopulated Earth, erased the past, and allowed these people here to go on with their work. But now, tonight, the dead were risen, Earth was reinhabited, memory awoke, a million names were spoken: What was so-and-so doing tonight on Earth? What about this one and that one?

The people on the porches glanced sidewise at each other's faces.

At nine o'clock Earth seemed to explode, catch fire, and burn. The people on the porches put up their hands as if to beat the fire out.

They waited.

By midnight the fire was extinguished. Earth was still there. There was a sigh, like an autumn wind, from the porches.

"We haven't heard from Harry for a long time."

"He's all right."

"We should send a message to Mother."

"She's all right."

"*Is* she?"

"Now, don't worry."

"Will she be all right, do you think?"

"Of course, of course; now come to bed."

But nobody moved. Late dinners were carried out onto the night lawns and set upon collapsible tables, and they picked at these slowly until two o'clock and the light-radio message flashed from Earth. They could read the great Morse-code flashes which flickered like a distant firefly:

AUSTRALIAN CONTINENT ATOMIZED IN PREMATURE EXPLOSION OF ATOMIC STOCKPILE. LOS ANGELES, LONDON BOMBED. WAR. COME HOME. COME HOME. COME HOME.

They stood up from their tables.

COME HOME. COME HOME. COME HOME.

"Have you heard from your brother Ted this year?"

"You know. With mail rates five bucks a letter to Earth, I don't write much."

COME HOME.

"I've been wondering about Jane; you remember Jane, my kid sister?"

COME HOME.

At three in the chilly morning the luggage-store proprietor glanced up. A lot of people were coming down the street.

"Stayed open late on purpose. What'll it be, mister?"

By dawn the luggage was gone from his shelves.

DECEMBER 2036:

THE SILENT TOWNS

There was a little white silent town on the edge of the dead Martian sea. The town was empty. No one moved in it. Lonely lights burned in the stores all day. The shop doors were wide, as if people had run off without using their keys. Magazines, brought from Earth on the silver rocket a month before, fluttered, untouched, burning brown, on wire racks fronting the silent drugstores.

The town was dead. Its beds were empty and cold. The only sound was the power hum of electric lines and dynamos, still alive, all by themselves. Water ran in forgotten bathtubs, poured out into living rooms, onto porches, and down through little garden plots to feed neglected flowers. In the dark theaters, gum under the many seats began to harden with tooth impressions still in it.

Across town was a rocket port. You could still smell the hard, scorched smell where the last rocket blasted off when it went back to Earth. If you dropped a dime in the telescope and pointed it at Earth, perhaps you could see the big war happening there. Perhaps you could see New York explode. Maybe London could be seen, covered with a new kind of fog. Perhaps then it might be understood why this small Martian town is abandoned. How quick was the evacuation? Walk in any store, bang the NO SALE key. Cash drawers jump out, all bright and jingly with coins. That war on Earth must be very bad....

Along the empty avenues of this town, now, whistling softly, kicking a tin can ahead of him in deepest concentration, came a tall, thin man. His eyes glowed with a dark, quiet look of loneliness. He moved his bony hands in his pockets, which were tinkling with new dimes. Occasionally he tossed a dime to the ground. He laughed temperately, doing this, and walked on, sprinkling bright dimes everywhere.

His name was Walter Gripp. He had a placer mine and a remote shack far up in the blue Martian hills and he walked to town once every two weeks to see if he could marry a quiet and intelligent woman. Over the years he had always returned to his shack, alone and disappointed. A week ago, arriving in town, he had found it this way!

That day he had been so surprised that he rushed to a delicatessen, flung wide a case, and ordered a triple-decker beef sandwich.

"Coming up!" he cried, a towel on his arm.

He flourished meats and bread baked the day before, dusted a table, invited himself to sit, and ate until he had to go find a soda fountain, where he ordered a bicarbonate. The druggist, being one Walter Gripp, was astoundingly polite and fizzed one right up for him!

He stuffed his jeans with money, all he could find. He loaded a boy's wagon with ten-dollar bills and ran lickety-split through town. Reaching the suburbs, he suddenly realized how shamefully silly he was. He didn't need money. He rode the ten-dollar bills back to where he'd found them, counted a dollar from his own wallet to pay for the sandwiches, dropped it in the delicatessen till, and added a quarter tip.

That night he enjoyed a hot Turkish bath, a succulent filet carpeted with delicate mushrooms, imported dry sherry, and strawberries in wine. He fitted himself for a new blue flannel suit and a rich gray Homburg which balanced oddly atop his gaunt head. He slid money into a juke box which played "That Old Gang of Mine." He dropped nickels in twenty boxes all over town. The lonely streets and the night were full of the sad music of "That Old Gang of Mine" as he walked, tall and thin and alone, his new shoes clumping softly, his cold hands in his pockets.

But that was a week past. He slept in a good house on Mars Avenue, rose mornings at nine, bathed, and idled to town for ham and eggs. No morning passed that he didn't freeze a ton of meats, vegetables, and lemon cream pies, enough to last ten years, until the rockets came back from Earth, if they ever came.

Now, tonight, he drifted up and down, seeing the wax women in every colorful shop window, pink and beautiful. For the first time he knew how dead the town was. He drew a glass of beer and sobbed gently.

"Why," he said, "I'm all *alone*."

He entered the Elite Theater to show himself a film, to distract his mind from his isolation. The theater was hollow, empty, like a tomb with phantoms crawling gray and black on the vast screen. Shivering, he hurried from the haunted place.

Having decided to return home, he was striking down the middle of a side street, almost running, when he heard the phone.

He listened.

"Phone ringing in someone's house."

He proceeded briskly.

"Someone should answer that phone," he mused.

He sat on a curb to pick a rock from his shoe, idly.

"Someone!" he screamed, leaping. "Me! Good lord, what's wrong with me!" he shrieked. He whirled. Which house? That one!

He raced over the lawn, up the steps, into the house, down a dark hall.

He yanked up the receiver.

"Hello!" he cried.

Buzzzzzzzzz.

"Hello, hello!"

They had hung up.

"Hello!" he shouted, and banged the phone. "You stupid idiot!" he cried to himself. "Sitting on that curb, you fool! Oh, you damned and awful fool!" He squeezed the phone. "Come on, ring again! Come *on*!"

He had never thought there might be others left on Mars. In the entire week he had seen no one. He had figured that all other towns were as empty as this one.

Now, staring at this terrible little black phone, he trembled. Interlocking dial systems connected every town on Mars. From which of thirty cities had the call come?

He didn't know.

He waited. He wandered to the strange kitchen, thawed some iced huckleberries, ate them disconsolately.

"There wasn't anyone on the other end of that call," he murmured. "Maybe a pole blew down somewhere and the phone rang by itself."

But hadn't he heard a click, which meant someone had hung up far away?

He stood in the hall the rest of the night. "Not because of the phone," he told himself. "I just haven't anything else to do."

He listened to his watch tick.

"She won't phone back," he said. "She won't *ever* call a number that didn't answer. She's probably dialing other houses in town right *now*! And here I sit— Wait a minute!" He laughed. "Why do I keep saying 'she'?"

He blinked. "It could as easily be a 'he,' couldn't it?"

His heart slowed. He felt very cold and hollow.

He wanted very much for it to be a "she."

He walked out of the house and stood in the center of the early, dim morning street.

He listened. Not a sound. No birds. No cars. Only his heart beating. Beat and pause and beat again. His face ached with strain. The wind blew gently, oh so gently, flapping his coat.

"Sh," he whispered. "*Listen.*"

He swayed in a slow circle, turning his head from one silent house to another.

She'll phone more and more numbers, he thought. It must be a woman. Why? Only a woman would call and call. A man wouldn't. A man's independent. Did I phone anyone? No! Never thought of it. It must be a woman. It *has* to be, by God!

Listen.

Far away, under the stars, a phone rang.

He ran. He stopped to listen. The ringing, soft. He ran a few more steps. Louder. He raced down an alley. Louder still! He passed six houses, six more. Much louder! He chose a house and its door was locked.

The phone rang inside.

"Damn you!" He jerked the doorknob.

The phone screamed.

He heaved a porch chair through the parlor window, leaped in after it.

Before he even touched the phone, it was silent.

He stalked through the house then and broke mirrors, tore down drapes, and kicked in the kitchen stove.

Finally, exhausted, he picked up the thin directory which listed every phone on Mars. Fifty thousand names.

He started with number one.

Amelia Arnes. He dialed her number in New Chicago, one hundred miles over the dead sea.

No answer.

Number two lived in New New York, five thousand miles across the blue mountains.

No answer.

He called three, four, five, six, seven, eight, his fingers jerking, unable to grip the receiver.

A woman's voice answered, "Hello?"

Walter cried back at her, "Hello, oh lord, hello!"

"This is a recording," recited the woman's voice. "Miss Helen Arasumian is not home. Will you leave a message on the wire spool so she may call you when she returns? Hello? This is a recording. Miss Arasumian is not home. Will you leave a message—"

He hung up.

He sat with his mouth twitching.

On second thought he redialed that number.

"When Miss Helen Arasumian comes home," he said, "tell her to go to hell."

He phoned Mars Junction, New Boston, Arcadia, and Roosevelt City exchanges, theorizing that they would be logical places for persons to dial from; after that he contacted local city halls and other public institutions in each town. He phoned the best hotels. Leave it to a woman to put herself up in luxury.

Suddenly he stopped, clapped his hands sharply together, and laughed. Of course! He checked the directory and dialed a long-distance call through to the biggest beauty parlor in New Texas City. If ever there was a place where a woman would putter around, patting mud packs on her face and sitting under a drier, it would be a velvet-soft, diamond-gem beauty parlor!

The phone rang. Someone at the other end lifted the receiver.

A woman's voice said, "Hello?"

"If this is a recording," announced Walter Gripp, "I'll come over and blow the place up."

"This isn't a record," said the woman's voice. "Hello! Oh, hello, there *is* someone alive! Where *are* you?" She gave a delighted scream.

Walter almost collapsed. "*You*!" He stood up jerkily, eyes wild. "Good lord, what luck, what's your name?"

"Genevieve Selsor!" She wept into the receiver. "Oh, I'm so glad to hear from you, whoever you are!"

"Walter Gripp!"

"Walter, hello, Walter!"

"Hello, Genevieve!"

"Walter. It's such a nice name. Walter, Walter!"

"Thank you."

"Walter, where *are* you?"

Her voice was so kind and sweet and fine. He held the phone tight to his ear so she could whisper sweetly into it. He felt his feet drift off the floor. His cheeks burned.

"I'm in Marlin Village," he said. "I—"

Buzz.

"Hello?" he said.

Buzz.

He jiggled the hook. Nothing.

Somewhere a wind had blown down a pole. As quickly as she had come, Genevieve Selsor was gone. He dialed, but the line was dead.

"I know where she is, anyway." He ran out of the house. The sun was rising as he backed a beetle-car from the stranger's garage, filled its back seat with food from the house, and set out at eighty miles an hour down the highway, heading for New Texas City.

A thousand miles, he thought. Genevieve Selsor, sit tight, you'll hear from me!

He honked his horn on every turn out of town.

At sunset, after an impossible day of driving, he pulled to the roadside, kicked off his tight shoes, laid himself out in the seat, and slid the gray Homburg over his weary eyes. His breathing became slow and regular. The wind blew and the stars shone gently upon him in the new dusk. The Martian mountains lay all around, millions of years old. Starlight glittered on the spires of a little Martian town, no bigger than a game of chess, in the blue hills.

He lay in the half-place between awakeness and dreams. He whispered. Genevieve. *Oh, Genevieve, sweet Genevieve*, he sang softly, *the years may come, the years may go. But Genevieve, sweet Genevieve...* There was a warmth in him. He heard her quiet sweet cool voice sighing. *Hello, oh, hello, Walter! This is no record. Where are you, Walter, where are you?*

He sighed, putting up a hand to touch her in the moonlight. Long dark hair shaking in the wind; beautiful, it was. And her lips like red peppermints. And her cheeks like fresh-cut wet roses. And her body like a clear vaporous mist, while her soft cool sweet voice crooned to him once more the words to the old sad song, *Oh, Genevieve, sweet Genevieve, the years may come, the years may go...*

He slept.

He reached New Texas City at midnight.

He halted before the Deluxe Beauty Salon, yelling.

He expected her to rush out, all perfume, all laughter.

Nothing happened.

"She's asleep." He walked to the door. "Here I am!" he called. "Hello, Genevieve!"

The town lay in double moonlit silence. Somewhere a wind flapped a canvas awning.

He swung the glass door wide and stepped in.

"Hey!" He laughed uneasily. "Don't hide! I know you're here!"

He searched every booth.

He found a tiny handkerchief on the floor. It smelled so good he almost lost his balance. "Genevieve," he said.

He drove the car through the empty streets but saw nothing. "If this is a practical joke..."

He slowed the car. "Wait a minute. We were cut off. Maybe she drove to Marlin Village while I was driving here! She probably took the old Sea Road. We missed each other during the day. How'd she know I'd come get her? I didn't say I would. And she was so afraid when the phone died that she rushed to Marlin Village to find me! And here I am, by God, what a fool *I* am!"

Giving the horn a blow, he shot out of town.

He drove all night. He thought, What if she isn't in Marlin Village waiting, when I arrive?

He wouldn't think of that. She *must* be there. And he would run up and hold her and perhaps even kiss her, once, on the lips.

Genevieve, sweet Genevieve, he whistled, stepping it up to one hundred miles an hour.

Marlin Village was quiet at dawn. Yellow lights were still burning in several stores, and a juke box that had played steadily for one hundred hours finally, with a crackle of electricity, ceased, making the silence complete. The sun warmed the streets and warmed the cold and vacant sky.

Walter turned down Main Street, the car lights still on, honking the horn a double toot, six times at one corner, six times at another. He peered at the store names. His face was white and tired, and his hands slid on the sweaty steering wheel.

"Genevieve!" he called in the empty street.

The door to a beauty salon opened.

"Genevieve!" He stopped the car.

Genevieve Selsor stood in the open door of the salon as he ran across the street. A box of cream chocolates lay open in her arms. Her fingers, cuddling it, were plump and pallid. Her face, as she stepped into the light, was round and thick, and her eyes were like two immense eggs stuck into a white mess of bread dough. Her legs were as big around as the stumps of trees, and she moved with an ungainly shuffle. Her hair was an indiscriminate shade of brown that had been made and remade, it appeared, as a nest for birds. She had no lips at all and compensated this by stenciling on a large red, greasy mouth that now popped open in delight, now shut in sudden alarm. She had plucked her brows to thin antenna lines.

Walter stopped. His smile dissolved. He stood looking at her.

She dropped her candy box to the sidewalk.

"Are you—Genevieve Selsor?" His ears rang.

"Are you Walter Griff?" she asked.

"Gripp."

"Gripp," she corrected herself.

"How do you do," he said with a restrained voice.

"How do you do." She shook his hand.

Her fingers were sticky with chocolate.

"Well," said Walter Gripp.

"What?" asked Genevieve Selsor.

"I just said, 'Well,'" said Walter.

"Oh."

It was nine o'clock at night. They had spent the day picnicking, and for supper he had prepared a filet mignon which she didn't like because it was too rare, so he broiled it some more and it was too much broiled or fried or something. He laughed and said, "We'll see a movie!" She said okay and put her chocolaty fingers on his elbow. But all she wanted to see was a eighty-year-old film of Clark Gable. "Doesn't he just kill you?" She giggled. "Doesn't he *kill* you, now?" The film ended. "Run it off again," she commanded. "Again?" he asked. "Again," she said. And when he returned she snuggled up and put her paws all over him. "You're not quite what I expected, but you're nice," she admitted. "Thanks," he said, swallowing. "Oh, that Gable," she said, and pinched his leg. "Ouch," he said.

After the film they went shopping down the silent streets. She broke a window and put on the brightest dress she could find. Dumping a perfume bottle on her hair, she resembled a drowned sheep dog. "How old are you?" he inquired. "Guess." Dripping, she led him down the street. "Oh, thirty," he said. "Well," she announced stiffly, "I'm only twenty-seven, so there!

"Here's another candy store!" she said. "Honest, I've led the life of Reilly since everything exploded. I never liked my folks, they were fools. They left for Earth two months ago. I was supposed to follow on the last rocket, but I stayed on; you know why?"

"Why?"

"Because everyone picked on me. So I stayed where I could throw perfume on myself all day and drink ten thousand malts and eat candy without people saying, 'Oh, that's full of calories!' So here I *am*!"

"Here you are." Walter shut his eyes.

"It's getting late," she said, looking at him.

"Yes."

"I'm tired," she said.

"Funny. I'm wide awake."

"Oh," she said.

"I feel like staying up all night," he said. "Say, there's a good record at Mike's. Come on, I'll play it for you."

"I'm tired." She glanced up at him with sly, bright eyes.

"I'm very alert," he said. "Strange."

"Come back to the beauty shop," she said. "I want to show you something."

She took him in through the glass door and walked him over to a large white box. "When I drove from Texas City," she said, "I brought this with me." She untied the pink ribbon. "I thought: Well, here I am, the only lady on Mars, and here is the

only man, and, well..." She lifted the lid and folded back crisp layers of whispery pink tissue paper. She gave it a pat. "There."

Walter Gripp stared.

"What is it?" he asked, beginning to tremble.

"Don't you know, silly? It's all lace and all white and all fine and everything."

"No, I don't know what it is."

"It's a wedding dress, silly!"

"Is it?" His voice cracked.

He shut his eyes. Her voice was still soft and cool and sweet, as it had been on the phone. But when he opened his eyes and looked at her...

He backed up. "How nice," he said.

"Isn't it?"

"Genevieve." He glanced at the door.

"Yes?"

"Genevieve, I've something to tell you."

"Yes?" She drifted toward him, the perfume smell thick about her round white face.

"The thing I have to say to you is..." he said.

"Yes?"

"Good-by!"

And he was out the door and into his car before she could scream.

She ran and stood on the curb as he swung the car about.

"Walter Griff, come back here!" she wailed, flinging up her arms.

"Gripp," he corrected her.

"Gripp!" she shouted.

The car whirled away down the silent street, regardless of her stompings and shriekings. The exhaust from it fluttered the white dress she crumpled in her plump hands, and the stars shone bright, and the car vanished out onto the desert and away into blackness.

He drove all night and all day for three nights and days. Once he thought he saw a car following, and he broke into a shivering sweat and took another highway, cutting off across the lonely Martian world, past little dead cities, and he drove and drove for a week and a day, until he had put ten thousand miles between himself and Marlin Village. Then he pulled into a small town named Holtville Springs, where there were some tiny stores he could light up at night and restaurants to sit in, ordering meals. And he's lived there ever since, with two deep freezes packed with food to last him one hundred years, and enough cigars to last ten thousand days, and a good bed with a soft mattress.

And when once in a while over the long years the phone rings—he doesn't answer.

APRIL 2057:

THE LONG YEARS

Whenever the wind came through the sky, he and his small family would sit in the stone hut and warm their hands over a wood fire. The wind would stir the canal waters and almost blow the stars out of the sky, but Mr. Hathaway would sit contented and talk to his wife, and his wife would reply, and he would speak to his two daughters and his son about the old days on Earth, and they would all answer neatly.

It was the twentieth year after the Great War. Mars was a tomb planet. Whether or not Earth was the same was a matter for much silent debate for Hathaway and his family on the long Martian nights.

This night one of the violent Martian dust storms had come over the low Martian graveyards, blowing through ancient towns and tearing away the plastic walls of the newer, American-built city that was melting down into the sand, desolated.

The storm abated. Hathaway went out into the cleared weather to see Earth burning green on the windy sky. He put his hand up as one might reach to adjust a dimly burning globe in the ceiling of a dark room. He looked across the long-dead sea bottoms. Not another living thing on this entire planet, he thought. Just myself. And *them*. He looked back within the stone hut.

What was happening on Earth now? He had seen no visible sign of change in Earth's aspect through his thirty-inch telescope. Well, he thought, I'm good for another twenty years if I'm careful. Someone might come. Either across the dead seas or out of space in a rocket on a little thread of red flame.

He called into the hut, "I'm going to take a walk."

"All right," his wife said.

He moved quietly down through a series of ruins. "Made in New York," he read from a piece of metal as he passed. "And all these things from Earth will be gone long before the old Martian towns." He looked toward the fifty-centuries-old village that lay among the blue mountains.

He came to a solitary Martian graveyard, a series of small hexagonal stones on a hill swept by the lonely wind.

He stood looking down at four graves with crude wooden crosses on them, and names. Tears did not come to his eyes. They had dried long ago.

"Do you forgive me for what I've done?" he asked of the crosses. "I was very much alone. You do understand, don't you?"

He returned to the stone hut and once more, just before going in, shaded his eyes, searching the black sky. "You keep waiting and waiting and looking," he said, "and one night, perhaps—"

There was a tiny red flame on the sky.

He stepped away from the light of the hut.

"—and you look *again*," he whispered.

The tiny red flame was still there.

"It wasn't there last night," he whispered.

He stumbled and fell, picked himself up, ran behind the hut, swiveled the telescope, and pointed it at the sky.

A minute later, after a long, wild staring, he appeared in the low door of the hut. The wife and the two daughters and the son turned their heads to him. Finally he was able to speak.

"I have good news," he said. "I have looked at the sky. A rocket is coming to take us all home. It will be here in the early morning."

He put his hands down and put his head into his hands and began to cry gently.

He burned what was left of New New York that morning at three.

He took a torch and moved into the plastic city and with the flame touched the walls here or there. The city bloomed up in great tosses of heat and light. It was a square mile of illumination, big enough to be seen out in space. It would beckon the rocket down to Mr. Hathaway and his family.

His heart beating rapidly with pain, he returned to the hut. "See?" He held up a dusty bottle into the light. "Wine I saved, just for tonight. I knew that someday someone would find us! We'll have a drink to celebrate!"

He poured five glasses full.

"It's been a long time," he said, gravely looking into his drink. "Remember the day the war broke? Twenty years and seven months ago. And all the rockets were called home from Mars. And you and I and the children were out in the mountains, doing archaeological work, research on the ancient surgical methods of the Martians. We ran our horses, almost killing them, remember? But we got here to the city a week late. Everyone was gone. America had been destroyed; every rocket had left without waiting for stragglers, remember, remember? And it turned out we were the *only* ones left? Lord, Lord, how the years pass. I couldn't have stood it without you here, all of you. I'd have killed myself without you. But with you, it was worth waiting. Here's to us, then." He lifted his glass. "And to our long wait together." He drank.

The wife and the two daughters and the son raised their glasses to their lips.

The wine ran down over the chins of all four of them.

By morning the city was blowing in great black soft flakes across the sea bottom. The fire was exhausted, but it had served its purpose; the red spot on the sky grew larger.

From the stone hut came the rich brown smell of baked gingerbread. His wife stood over the table, setting down the hot pans of new bread as Hathaway entered. The two daughters were gently sweeping the bare stone floor with stiff brooms, and the son was polishing the silverware. "We'll have a huge breakfast for them," laughed Hathaway. "Put on your best clothes!"

He hurried across his land to the vast metal storage shed. Inside was the cold-storage unit and power plant he had repaired and restored with his efficient, small, nervous fingers over the years, just as he had repaired clocks, telephones, and spool recorders in his spare time. The shed was full of things he had built, some senseless mechanisms the functions of which were a mystery even to himself now as he looked upon them.

From the deep freeze he fetched rimed cartons of beans and strawberries, twenty years old. Lazarus come forth, he thought, and pulled out a cool chicken.

The air was full of cooking odors when the rocket landed.

Like a boy, Hathaway raced down the hill. He stopped once because of a sudden sick pain in his chest. He sat on a rock to regain his breath, then ran all the rest of the way.

He stood in the hot atmosphere generated by the fiery rocket. A port opened. A man looked down.

Hathaway shielded his eyes and at last said, "Captain Wilder!"

"Who is it?" asked Captain Wilder, and jumped down and stood there looking at the old man. He put his hand out. "Good lord, it's Hathaway!"

"That's right." They looked into each other's faces.

"Hathaway, from my old crew, from the Fourth Expedition."

"It's been a long time, Captain."

"Too long. It's good to see you."

"I'm old," said Hathaway simply.

"I'm not young myself any more. I've been out to Jupiter and Saturn and Neptune for twenty years."

"I heard they had kicked you upstairs so you wouldn't interfere with colonial policy here on Mars." The old man looked around. "You've been gone so long you don't know what's happened—"

Wilder said, "I can guess. We've circled Mars twice. Found only one other man, name of Walter Gripp, about ten thousand miles from here. We offered to take him with us, but he said no. The last we saw of him he was sitting in the middle of the highway in a rocking chair, smoking a pipe, waving to us. Mars is pretty well dead, not even a Martian alive. What about Earth?"

"You know as much as I do. Once in a while I get the Earth radio, very faintly. But it's always in some other language. I'm sorry to say I only know Latin. A few words come through. I take it most of Earth's a shambles, but the war goes on. Are you going back, sir?"

"Yes. We're curious, of course. We had no radio contact so far out in space. We'll want to see Earth, no matter what."

"You'll take us with you?"

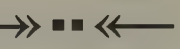
The captain started. "Of course, your wife, I remember her. Twenty-five years ago, wasn't it? When they opened First Town and you quit the service and brought her up here. And there were children—"

"My son and two daughters."

"Yes, I remember. They're here?"

"Up at our hut. There's a fine breakfast waiting for all of you up the hill. Will you come?"

"We would be honored, Mr. Hathaway." Captain Wilder called to the rocket, "Abandon ship!"



They walked up the hill, Hathaway and Captain Wilder, the twenty crew members following, taking deep breaths of the thin, cool morning air. The sun rose and it was a good day.

"Do you remember Spender, Captain?"

"I've never forgotten him."

"About once a year I walk up past his tomb. It looks like he got his way at last. He didn't want us to come here, and I suppose he's happy now that we've all gone away."

"What about—what was his name?—Parkhill, Sam Parkhill?"

"He opened a hot-dog stand."

"It sounds just *like* him."

"And went back to Earth the next week for the war." Hathaway put his hand to his chest and sat down abruptly upon a boulder. "I'm sorry. The excitement. Seeing you again after all these years. Have to rest." He felt his heart pound. He counted the beats. It was very bad.

"We've a doctor," said Wilder. "Excuse me, Hathaway, I know you are one, but we'd better check you with our own—" The doctor was summoned.

"I'll be all right," insisted Hathaway. "The waiting, the excitement." He could hardly breathe. His lips were blue. "You know," he said as the doctor placed a stethoscope to him, "it's as if I kept alive all these years just for this day, and now you're here to take me back to Earth, I'm satisfied and I can just lie down and quit."

"Here." The doctor handed him a yellow pellet. "We'd better let you rest."

"Nonsense. Just let me sit a moment. It's good to see all of you. Good to hear new voices again."

"Is the pellet working?"

"Fine. Here we go!"

They walked on up the hill.

"**Alice, come see** who's here!"

Hathaway frowned and bent into the hut. "Alice, did you hear?"

His wife appeared. A moment later the two daughters, tall and gracious, came out, followed by an even taller son.

"Alice, you remember Captain Wilder?"

She hesitated and looked at Hathaway as if for instructions and then smiled. "Of course, Captain Wilder!"

"I remember, we had dinner together the night before I took off for Jupiter, Mrs. Hathaway."

She shook his hand vigorously. "My daughters, Marguerite and Susan. My son, John. You remember the captain, surely?"

Hands were shaken amid laughter and much talk.

Captain Wilder sniffed the air. "Is that *gingerbread*?"

"Will you have some?"

Everyone moved. Folding tables were hurried out while hot foods were rushed forth and plates and fine damask napkins and good silverware were laid. Captain Wilder stood looking first at Mrs. Hathaway and then at her son and her two tall, quiet-moving daughters. He looked into their faces as they darted past and he followed every move of their youthful hands and every expression of their wrinkleless faces. He sat upon a chair the son brought. "How old are you, John?"

The son replied, "Twenty-three."

Wilder shifted his silverware clumsily. His face was suddenly pale. The man next to him whispered, "Captain Wilder, that can't be right."

The son moved away to bring more chairs.

"What's that, Williamson?"

"I'm forty-three myself, Captain. I was in school the same time as young John Hathaway there, twenty years ago. He says he's only twenty-three now; he only *looks* twenty-three. But that's wrong. He should be forty-two, at least. What's it mean, sir?"

"I don't know."

"You look kind of sick, sir."

"I don't feel well. The daughters, too, I saw them twenty years or so ago; they haven't changed, not a wrinkle. Will you do me a favor? I want you to run an errand, Williamson. I'll tell you where to go and what to check. Late in the breakfast, slip away. It should take you only ten minutes. The place isn't far from here. I saw it from the rocket as we landed."

"Here! What are you talking about so seriously?" Mrs. Hathaway ladled quick spoons of soup into their bowls. "Smile now; we're all together, the trip's over, and it's like home!"

"Yes." Captain Wilder laughed. "You certainly look very well and young, Mrs. Hathaway!"

"Isn't that like a man!"

He watched her drift away, drift with her pink face warm, smooth as an apple, unwrinkled and colorful. She chimed her laugh at every joke, she tossed salads neatly, never once pausing for breath. And the bony son and curved daughters were bril-

liantly witty, like their father, telling of the long years and their secret life, while their father nodded proudly to each.

Williamson slipped off down the hill.

"Where's *he* going?" asked Hathaway.

"Checking the rocket," said Wilder. "But, as I was saying, Hathaway, there's nothing on Jupiter, nothing at all for men. That includes Saturn and Pluto." Wilder talked mechanically, not hearing his words, thinking only of Williamson running down the hill and climbing back to tell what he had found.

"Thanks." Marguerite Hathaway was filling his water glass. Impulsively he touched her arm. She did not even mind. Her flesh was warm and soft.

Hathaway, across the table, paused several times, touched his chest with his fingers, painfully, then went on listening to the murmuring talk and sudden loud chattering, glancing now and again with concern at Wilder, who did not seem to like chewing his gingerbread.

Williamson returned. He sat picking at his food until the captain whispered aside to him, "Well?"

"I found it, sir."

"And?"

Williamson's cheeks were white. He kept his eyes on the laughing people. The daughters were smiling gravely and the son was telling a joke. Williamson said, "I went into the graveyard."

"The four crosses were there?"

"The four crosses were there, sir. The names were still on them. I wrote them down to be sure." He read from a white paper: "Alice, Marguerite, Susan, and John Hathaway. Died of unknown virus. July 2038."

"Thank you, Williamson." Wilder closed his eyes.

"Nineteen years ago, sir." Williamson's hand trembled.

"Yes."

"Then who are *these*!"

"I don't know."

"What are you going to do?"

"I don't know that either."

"Will we tell the other men?"

"Later. Go on with your food as if nothing happened."

"I'm not very hungry now, sir."

The meal ended with wine brought from the rocket. Hathaway arose. "A toast to all of you; it's good to be with friends again. And to my wife and children, without whom I couldn't have survived alone. It is only through their kindness in caring for me that I've lived on, waiting for your arrival." He moved his wineglass toward his family, who looked back self-consciously, lowering their eyes at last as everyone drank.

Hathaway drank down his wine. He did not cry out as he fell forward onto the table and slipped to the ground. Several men eased him to rest. The doctor bent to him and listened. Wilder touched the doctor's shoulder. The doctor looked up and

shook his head. Wilder knelt and took the old man's hand. "Wilder?" Hathaway's voice was barely audible. "I spoiled the breakfast."

"Nonsense."

"Say good-by to Alice and the children for me."

"Just a moment, I'll call them."

"No, no, don't!" gasped Hathaway. "They wouldn't understand. I wouldn't want them to understand! Don't!"

Wilder did not move.

Hathaway was dead.

Wilder waited for a long time. Then he arose and walked away from the stunned group around Hathaway. He went to Alice Hathaway, looked into her face, and said, "Do you know what has just happened?"

"Something about my husband?"

"He's just passed away; his heart," said Wilder, watching her.

"I'm sorry," she said.

"How do you feel?" he asked.

"He didn't want us to feel badly. He told us it would happen one day and he didn't want us to cry. He didn't teach us how, you know. He didn't want us to know. He said it was the worst thing that could happen to a man to know how to be lonely and know how to be sad and then to cry. So we're not to know what crying is, or being sad."

Wilder glanced at her hands, the soft warm hands and the fine manicured nails and the tapered wrists. He saw her slender, smooth white neck and her intelligent eyes. Finally he said, "Mr. Hathaway did a fine job on you and your children."

"He would have liked to hear you say that. He was so proud of us. After a while he even forgot that he had made us. At the end he loved and took us as his real wife and children. And, in a way, we *are*."

"You gave him a good deal of comfort."

"Yes, for years on end we sat and talked. He so much loved to talk. He liked the stone hut and the open fire. We could have lived in a regular house in the town, but he liked it up here, where he could be primitive if he liked, or modern if he liked. He told me all about his laboratory and the things he did in it. He wired the entire dead American town below with sound speakers. When he pressed a button the town lit up and made noises as if ten thousand people lived in it. There were airplane noises and car noises and the sounds of people talking. He would sit and light a cigar and talk to us, and the sounds of the town would come up to us, and once in a while the phone would ring and a recorded voice would ask Mr. Hathaway scientific and surgical questions and he would answer them. With the phone ringing and us here and the sounds of the town and his cigar, Mr. Hathaway was quite happy. There's only one thing he couldn't make us do," she said. "And that was to grow old. He got older every day, but we stayed the same. I guess he didn't mind. I guess he wanted us this way."

"We'll bury him down in the yard where the other four crosses are. I think he would like that."

She put her hand on his wrist, lightly. "I'm sure he would."

Orders were given. The family followed the little procession down the hill. Two men carried Hathaway on a covered stretcher. They passed the stone hut and the storage shed where Hathaway, many years before, had begun his work. Wilder paused within the workshop door.

How would it be, he wondered, to live on a planet with a wife and three children and have them die, leaving you alone with the wind and silence? What would a person do? Bury them with crosses in the graveyard and then come back up to the workshop and, with all the power of mind and memory and accuracy of finger and genius, put together, bit by bit, all those things that were wife, son, daughter. With an entire American city below from which to draw needed supplies, a brilliant man might do anything.

The sound of their footsteps was muffled in the sand. At the graveyard, as they turned in, two men were already spading out the earth.

They returned to the rocket in the late afternoon. Williamson nodded at the stone hut. "What are we going to do about *them*?"

"I don't know," said the captain.

"Are you going to turn them off?"

"Off?" The captain looked faintly surprised. "It never entered my mind."

"You're not taking them back with us?"

"No, it would be useless."

"You mean you're going to leave them here, like *that*, as they *are*!"

The captain handed Williamson a gun. "If you can do anything about this, you're a better man than I."

Five minutes later Williamson returned from the hut, sweating. "Here, take your gun. I understand what you mean now. I went in the hut with the gun. One of the daughters smiled at me. So did the others. The wife offered me a cup of tea. Lord, it'd be murder!"

Wilder nodded. "There'll never be anything as fine as them again. They're built to last; ten, fifty, two hundred years. Yes, they've as much right to—to life as you or I or any of us." He knocked out his pipe. "Well, get aboard. We're taking off. This city's done for, we'll not be using it."

It was late in the day. A cold wind was rising. The men were aboard. The captain hesitated. Williamson said, "Don't tell me you're going back to say—good-by—to them?"

The captain looked at Williamson coldly. "None of your business."

Wilder strode up toward the hut through the darkening wind. The men in the rocket saw his shadow lingering in the stone-hut doorway. They saw a woman's shadow. They saw the captain shake her hand.

Moments later he came running back to the rocket.

On nights when the wind comes over the dead sea bottoms and through the hexagonal graveyard, over four old crosses and one new one, there is a light burning in the low stone hut, and in that hut, as the wind roars by and the dust whirls and the cold stars burn, are four figures, a woman, two daughters, a son, tending a low fire for no reason and talking and laughing.

Night after night for every year and every year, for no reason at all, the woman comes out and looks at the sky, her hands up, for a long moment, looking at the green burning of Earth, not knowing why she looks, and then she goes back and throws a stick on the fire, and the wind comes up and the dead sea goes on being dead.

AUGUST 2057:

THERE WILL COME SOFT RAINS

In the living room the voice-clock sang, *Tick-tock, seven o'clock, time to get up, time to get up, seven o'clock!* as if it were afraid that nobody would. The morning house lay empty. The clock ticked on, repeating and repeating its sounds into the emptiness. *Seven-nine, breakfast time, seven-nine!*

In the kitchen the breakfast stove gave a hissing sigh and ejected from its warm interior eight pieces of perfectly browned toast, eight eggs sunnyside up, sixteen slices of bacon, two coffees, and two cool glasses of milk.

"Today is August 4, 2057," said a second voice from the kitchen ceiling, "in the city of Allendale, California." It repeated the date three times for memory's sake. "Today is Mr. Featherstone's birthday. Today is the anniversary of Tilita's marriage. Insurance is payable, as are the water, gas, and light bills."

Somewhere in the walls, relays clicked, memory tapes glided under electric eyes.

Eight-one, tick-tock, eight-one o'clock, off to school, off to work, run, run, eight-one! But no doors slammed, no carpets took the soft tread of rubber heels. It was raining outside. The weather box on the front door sang quietly: "Rain, rain, go away; rubbers, raincoats for today..." And the rain tapped on the empty house, echoing.

Outside, the garage chimed and lifted its door to reveal the waiting car. After a long wait the door swung down again.

At eight-thirty the eggs were shriveled and the toast was like stone. An aluminum wedge scraped them into the sink, where hot water whirled them down a metal throat which digested and flushed them away to the distant sea. The dirty dishes were dropped into a hot washer and emerged twinkling dry.

Nine-fifteen, sang the clock, *time to clean.*

Out of warrens in the wall, tiny robot mice darted. The rooms were acrawl with the small cleaning animals, all rubber and metal. They thudded against chairs, whirling their mustached runners, kneading the rug nap, sucking gently at hidden dust. Then, like mysterious invaders, they popped into their burrows. Their pink electric eyes faded. The house was clean.

Ten o'clock. The sun came out from behind the rain. The house stood alone in a city of rubble and ashes. This was the one house left standing. At night the ruined city gave off a radioactive glow which could be seen for miles.

Ten-fifteen. The garden sprinklers whirled up in golden founts, filling the soft morning air with scatterings of brightness. The water pelted windowpanes, running down the charred west side where the house had been burned evenly free of its white

paint. The entire west face of the house was black, save for five places. Here the silhouette in paint of a man mowing a lawn. Here, as in a photograph, a woman bent to pick flowers. Still farther over, their images burned on wood in one titanic instant, a small boy, hands flung into the air; higher up, the image of a thrown ball, and opposite him a girl, hands raised to catch a ball which never came down.

The five spots of paint—the man, the woman, the children, the ball—remained. The rest was a thin charcoaled layer.

The gentle sprinkler rain filled the garden with falling light.

Until this day, how well the house had kept its peace. How carefully it had inquired, "Who goes there? What's the password?" and, getting no answer from lonely foxes and whining cats, it had shut up its windows and drawn shades in an old-maidenly preoccupation with self-protection which bordered on a mechanical paranoia.

It quivered at each sound, the house did. If a sparrow brushed a window, the shade snapped up. The bird, startled, flew off! No, not even a bird must touch the house!

The house was an altar with ten thousand attendants, big, small, servicing, attending, in choirs. But the gods had gone away, and the ritual of the religion continued senselessly, uselessly.

Twelve noon.

A dog whined, shivering, on the front porch.

The front door recognized the dog voice and opened. The dog, once huge and fleshy, but now gone to bone and covered with sores, moved in and through the house, tracking mud. Behind it whirred angry mice, angry at having to pick up mud, angry at inconvenience.

For not a leaf fragment blew under the door but what the wall panels flipped open and the copper scrap rats flashed swiftly out. The offending dust, hair, or paper, seized in miniature steel jaws, was raced back to the burrows. There, down tubes which fed into the cellar, it was dropped into the sighing vent of an incinerator which sat like evil Baal in a dark corner.

The dog ran upstairs, hysterically yelping to each door, at last realizing, as the house realized, that only silence was here.

It sniffed the air and scratched the kitchen door. Behind the door, the stove was making pancakes which filled the house with a rich baked odor and the scent of maple syrup.

The dog frothed at the mouth, lying at the door, sniffing, its eyes turned to fire. It ran wildly in circles, biting at its tail, spun in a frenzy, and died. It lay in the parlor for an hour.

Two o'clock, sang a voice.

Delicately sensing decay at last, the regiments of mice hummed out as softly as blown gray leaves in an electrical wind.

Two-fifteen.

The dog was gone.

In the cellar, the incinerator glowed suddenly and a whirl of sparks leaped up the chimney.

Two thirty-five.

Bridge tables sprouted from patio walls. Playing cards fluttered onto pads in a shower of pips. Martinis manifested on an oaken bench with egg-salad sandwiches. Music played.

But the tables were silent and the cards untouched.

At four o'clock the tables folded like great butterflies back through the paneled walls.

Four-thirty.

The nursery walls glowed.

Animals took shape: yellow giraffes, blue lions, pink antelopes, lilac panthers cavorting in crystal substance. The walls were glass. They looked out upon color and fantasy. Hidden films clocked through well-oiled sprockets, and the walls lived. The nursery floor was woven to resemble a crisp, cereal meadow. Over this ran aluminum roaches and iron crickets, and in the hot still air butterflies of delicate red tissue wavered among the sharp aroma of animal spoors! There was the sound like a great matted yellow hive of bees within a dark bellows, the lazy bumble of a purring lion. And there was the patter of okapi feet and the murmur of a fresh jungle rain, like other hoofs, falling upon the summer-starched grass. Now the walls dissolved into distances of parched weed, mile on mile, and warm endless sky. The animals drew away into thorn brakes and water holes.

It was the children's hour.

Five o'clock. The bath filled with clear hot water.

Six, seven, eight o'clock. The dinner dishes manipulated like magic tricks, and in the study a *click.* In the metal stand opposite the hearth where a fire now blazed up warmly, a cigar popped out, half an inch of soft gray ash on it, smoking, waiting.

Nine o'clock. The beds warmed their hidden circuits, for nights were cool here.

Nine-five. A voice spoke from the study ceiling:

"Mrs. McClellan, which poem would you like this evening?"

The house was silent.

The voice said at last, "Since you express no preference, I shall select a poem at random." Quiet music rose to back the voice. "Sara Teasdale. As I recall, your favorite....

"There will come soft rains and the smell of the ground,
And swallows circling with their shimmering sound;

And frogs in the pools singing at night,
And wild plum trees in tremulous white;

Robins will wear their feathery fire,
Whistling their whims on a low fence-wire;

And not one will know of the war, not one
Will care at last when it is done.

Not one would mind, neither bird nor tree,
If mankind perished utterly;

And Spring herself, when she woke at dawn
Would scarcely know that we were gone."

The fire burned on the stone hearth and the cigar fell away into a mound of quiet ash on its tray. The empty chairs faced each other between the silent walls, and the music played.

At ten o'clock the house began to die.

The wind blew. A falling tree bough crashed through the kitchen window. Cleaning solvent, bottled, shattered over the stove. The room was ablaze in an instant!

"Fire!" screamed a voice. The house lights flashed, water pumps shot water from the ceilings. But the solvent spread on the linoleum, licking, eating, under the kitchen door, while the voices took it up in chorus: "Fire, fire, fire!"

The house tried to save itself. Doors sprang tightly shut, but the windows were broken by the heat and the wind blew and sucked upon the fire.

The house gave ground as the fire in ten billion angry sparks moved with flaming ease from room to room and then up the stairs. While scurrying water rats squeaked from the walls, pistoled their water, and ran for more. And the wall sprays let down showers of mechanical rain.

But too late. Somewhere, sighing, a pump shrugged to a stop. The quenching rain ceased. The reserve water supply which had filled baths and washed dishes for many quiet days was gone.

The fire crackled up the stairs. It fed upon Picassos and Matisses in the upper halls, like delicacies, baking off the oily flesh, tenderly crisping the canvases into black shavings.

Now the fire lay in beds, stood in windows, changed the colors of drapes!

And then, reinforcements.

From attic trapdoors, blind robot faces peered down with faucet mouths gushing green chemical.

The fire backed off, as even an elephant must at the sight of a dead snake. Now there were twenty snakes whipping over the floor, killing the fire with a clear cold venom of green froth.

But the fire was clever. It had sent flame outside the house, up through the attic to the pumps there. An explosion! The attic brain which directed the pumps was shattered into bronze shrapnel on the beams.

The fire rushed back into every closet and felt of the clothes hung there.

The house shuddered, oak bone on bone, its bared skeleton cringing from the heat, its wire, its nerves revealed as if a surgeon had torn the skin off to let the red

veins and capillaries quiver in the scalded air. Help, help! Fire! Run, run! Heat snapped mirrors like the first brittle winter ice. And the voices wailed Fire, fire, run, run, like a tragic nursery rhyme, a dozen voices, high, low, like children dying in a forest, alone, alone. And the voices fading as the wires popped their sheathings like hot chestnuts. One, two, three, four, five voices died.

In the nursery the jungle burned. Blue lions roared, purple giraffes bounded off. The panthers ran in circles, changing color, and ten million animals, running before the fire, vanished off toward a distant steaming river....

Ten more voices died. In the last instant under the fire avalanche, other choruses, oblivious, could be heard announcing the time, playing music, cutting the lawn by remote-control mower, or setting an umbrella frantically out and in the slamming and opening front door, a thousand things happening, like a clock shop when each clock strikes the hour insanely before or after the other, a scene of maniac confusion, yet unity; singing, screaming, a few last cleaning mice darting bravely out to carry the horrid ashes away! And one voice, with sublime disregard for the situation, read poetry aloud in the fiery study, until all the film spools burned, until all the wires withered and the circuits cracked.

The fire burst the house and let it slam flat down, puffing out skirts of spark and smoke.

In the kitchen, an instant before the rain of fire and timber, the stove could be seen making breakfasts at a psychopathic rate, ten dozen eggs, six loaves of toast, twenty dozen bacon strips, which, eaten by fire, started the stove working again, hysterically hissing!

The crash. The attic smashing into kitchen and parlor. The parlor into cellar, cellar into subcellar. Deep freeze, armchair, film tapes, circuits, beds, and all like skeletons thrown in a cluttered mound deep under.

Smoke and silence. A great quantity of smoke.

Dawn showed faintly in the east. Among the ruins, one wall stood alone. Within the wall, a last voice said, over and over again and again, even as the sun rose to shine upon the heaped rubble and steam:

"Today is August 5, 2057, today is August 5, 2057, today is..."

OCTOBER 2057:

THE MILLION-YEAR PICNIC

Somehow the idea was brought up by Mom that perhaps the whole family would enjoy a fishing trip. But they weren't Mom's words; Timothy knew that. They were Dad's words, and Mom used them for him somehow.

Dad shuffled his feet in a clutter of Martian pebbles and agreed. So immediately there was a tumult and a shouting, and very quickly the camp was tucked into capsules and containers, Mom slipped into traveling jumpers and blouse, Dad stuffed his pipe full with trembling hands, his eyes on the Martian sky, and the three boys piled yelling into the motorboat, none of them really keeping an eye on Mom and Dad, except Timothy.

Dad pushed a stud. The water boat sent a humming sound up into the sky. The water shook back and the boat nosed ahead, and the family cried, "Hurrah!"

Timothy sat in the back of the boat with Dad, his small fingers atop Dad's hairy ones, watching the canal twist, leaving the crumbled place behind where they had landed in their small family rocket all the way from Earth. He remembered the night before they left Earth, the hustling and hurrying, the rocket that Dad had found somewhere, somehow, and the talk of a vacation on Mars. A long way to go for a vacation, but Timothy said nothing because of his younger brothers. They came to Mars and now, first thing, or so they said, they were going fishing.

Dad had a funny look in his eyes as the boat went up-canal. A look that Timothy couldn't figure. It was made of strong light and maybe a sort of relief. It made the deep wrinkles laugh instead of worry or cry.

So there went the cooling rocket, around a bend, gone.

"How far are we going?" Robert splashed his hand. It looked like a small crab jumping in the violet water.

Dad exhaled. "A million years."

"Gee," said Robert.

"Look, kids." Mother pointed one soft long arm. "There's a dead city."

They looked with fervent anticipation, and the dead city lay dead for them alone, drowsing in a hot silence of summer made on Mars by a Martian weatherman.

And Dad looked as if he was pleased that it was dead.

It was a futile spread of pink rocks sleeping on a rise of sand, a few tumbled pillars, one lonely shrine, and then the sweep of sand again. Nothing else for miles. A white desert around the canal and a blue desert over it.

Just then a bird flew up. Like a stone thrown across a blue pond, hitting, falling deep, and vanishing.

Dad got a frightened look when he saw it. "I thought it was a rocket."

Timothy looked at the deep ocean sky, trying to see Earth and the war and the ruined cities and the men killing each other since the day he was born. But he saw nothing. The war was as removed and far off as two flies battling to the death in the arch of a great high and silent cathedral. And just as senseless.

William Thomas wiped his forehead and felt the touch of his son's hand on his arm, like a young tarantula, thrilled. He beamed at his son. "How goes it, Timmy?"

"Fine, Dad."

Timothy hadn't quite figured out what was ticking inside the vast adult mechanism beside him. The man with the immense hawk nose, sunburnt, peeling—and the hot blue eyes like agate marbles you play with after school in summer back on Earth, and the long thick columnar legs in the loose riding breeches.

"What are you looking at so hard, Dad?"

"I was looking for Earthian logic, common sense, good government, peace, and responsibility."

"All that up there?"

"No. I didn't find it. It's not there any more. Maybe it'll never be there again. Maybe we fooled ourselves that it was ever there."

"Huh?"

"See the fish," said Dad, pointing.

There rose a soprano clamor from all three boys as they rocked the boat in arching their tender necks to see. They *oohed* and *ahed*. A silver ring fish floated by them, undulating, and closing like an iris, instantly, around food particles, to assimilate them.

Dad looked at it. His voice was deep and quiet.

"Just like war. War swims along, sees food, contracts. A moment later—Earth is gone."

"William," said Mom.

"Sorry," said Dad. They sat still and felt the canal water rush cool, swift, and glassy. The only sound was the motor hum, the glide of water, the sun expanding the air.

"When do we see the Martians?" cried Michael.

"Quite soon, perhaps," said Father. "Maybe tonight."

"Oh, but the Martians are a dead race now," said Mom.

"No, they're not. I'll show you some Martians, all right," Dad said presently.

Timothy scowled at that but said nothing. Everything was odd now. Vacations and fishing and looks between people.

The other boys were already engaged making shelves of their small hands and peering under them toward the seven-foot stone banks of the canal, watching for Martians.

"What do they look like?" demanded Michael.

"You'll know them when you see them." Dad sort of laughed, and Timothy saw a pulse beating time in his cheek.

Mother was slender and soft, with a woven plait of spun-gold hair over her head in a tiara, and eyes the color of the deep cool canal water where it ran in shadow, almost purple, with flecks of amber caught in it. You could see her thoughts swimming around in her eyes, like fish—some bright, some dark, some fast, quick, some slow and easy, and sometimes, like when she looked up where Earth was, being nothing but color and nothing else. She sat in the boat's prow, one hand resting on the side lip, the other on the lap of her dark blue breeches, and a line of sunburnt soft neck showing where her blouse opened like a white flower.

She kept looking ahead to see what was there, and, not being able to see it clearly enough, she looked backward toward her husband, and through his eyes, reflected then, she saw what was ahead; and since he added part of himself to this reflection, a determined firmness, her face relaxed and she accepted it and she turned back, knowing suddenly what to look for.

Timothy looked too. But all he saw was a straight pencil line of canal going violet through a wide shallow valley penned by low, eroded hills, and on until it fell over the sky's edge. And this canal went on and on, through cities that would have rattled like beetles in a dry skull if you shook them. A hundred or two hundred cities dreaming hot summer-day dreams and cool summer-night dreams...

They had come millions of miles for this outing—to fish. But there had been a gun on the rocket. This was a vacation. But why all the food, more than enough to last them years and years, left hidden back there near the rocket? Vacation. Just behind the veil of the vacation was not a soft face of laughter, but something hard and bony and perhaps terrifying. Timothy could not lift the veil, and the two other boys were busy being ten and eight years old, respectively.

"No Martians yet. Nuts." Robert put his V-shaped chin on his hands and glared at the canal.

Dad had brought an atomic radio along, strapped to his wrist. It functioned on an old-fashioned principle: you held it against the bones near your ear and it vibrated singing or talking to you. Dad listened to it now. His face looked like one of those fallen Martian cities, caved in, sucked dry, almost dead.

Then he gave it to Mom to listen. Her lips dropped open.

"What—" Timothy started to question, but never finished what he wished to say.

For at that moment there were two titanic, marrow-jolting explosions that grew upon themselves, followed by a half dozen minor concussions.

Jerking his head up, Dad notched the boat speed higher immediately. The boat leaped and jounced and spanked. This shook Robert out of his funk and elicited yelps of frightened but ecstatic joy from Michael, who clung to Mom's legs and watched the water pour by his nose in a wet torrent.

Dad swerved the boat, cut speed, and ducked the craft into a little branch canal and under an ancient, crumbling stone wharf that smelled of crab flesh. The boat rammed the wharf hard enough to throw them all forward, but no one was hurt, and Dad was already twisted to see if the ripples on the canal were enough to map their

route into hiding. Water lines went across, lapped the stones, and rippled back to meet each other, settling, to be dappled by the sun. It all went away.

Dad listened. So did everybody.

Dad's breathing echoed like fists beating against the cold wet wharf stones. In the shadow, Mom's cat eyes just watched Father for some clue to what next.

Dad relaxed and blew out a breath, laughing at himself.

"The rocket, of course. I'm getting jumpy. The rocket."

Michael said, "What happened, Dad, what happened?"

"Oh, we just blew up our rocket, is all," said Timothy, trying to sound matter-of-fact. "I've heard rockets blown up before. Ours just blew."

"Why did we blow up our rocket?" asked Michael. "Huh, Dad?"

"It's part of the game, silly!" said Timothy.

"A game!" Michael and Robert loved the word.

"Dad fixed it so it would blow up and no one'd know where we landed or went! In case they ever came looking, see?"

"Oh boy, a secret!"

"Scared by my own rocket," admitted Dad to Mom. "I *am* nervous. It's silly to think there'll ever be any more rockets. Except *one*, perhaps, if Edwards and his wife get through with *their* ship."

He put his tiny radio to his ear again. After two minutes he dropped his hand as you would drop a rag.

"It's over at last," he said to Mom. "The radio just went off the atomic beam. Every other world station's gone. They dwindled down to a couple in the last few years. Now the air's completely silent. It'll probably remain silent."

"For how long?" asked Robert.

"Maybe—your great-grandchildren will hear it again," said Dad. He just sat there, and the children were caught in the center of his awe and defeat and resignation and acceptance.

Finally he put the boat out into the canal again, and they continued in the direction in which they had originally started.

It was getting late. Already the sun was down the sky, and a series of dead cities lay ahead of them.

Dad talked very quietly and gently to his sons. Many times in the past he had been brisk, distant, removed from them, but now he patted them on the head with just a word and they felt it.

"Mike, pick a city."

"What, Dad?"

"Pick a city, Son. Any one of these cities we pass."

"All right," said Michael. "How do I pick?"

"Pick the one you like the most. You, too, Robert and Tim. Pick the city you like best."

"I want a city with Martians in it," said Michael.

"You'll have that," said Dad. "I promise." His lips were for the children, but his eyes were for Mom.

They passed six cities in twenty minutes. Dad didn't say anything more about the explosions; he seemed much more interested in having fun with his sons, keeping them happy, than anything else.

Michael liked the first city they passed, but this was vetoed because everyone doubted quick first judgments. The second city nobody liked. It was an Earth Man's settlement, built of wood and already rotting into sawdust. Timothy liked the third city because it was large. The fourth and fifth were too small and the sixth brought acclaim from everyone, including Mother, who joined in the Gees, Goshes, and Look-at-thats!

There were fifty or sixty huge structures still standing, streets were dusty but paved, and you could see one or two old centrifugal fountains still pulsing wetly in the plazas. That was the only life-water leaping in the late sunlight.

"This is the city," said everybody.

Steering the boat to a wharf, Dad jumped out.

"Here we are. This is ours. This is where we live from now on!"

"From now on?" Michael was incredulous. He stood up, looking, and then turned to blink back at where the rocket used to be. "What about the rocket? What about Minnesota?"

"Here," said Dad.

He touched the small radio to Michael's blond head. "Listen."

Michael listened.

"Nothing," he said.

"That's right. Nothing. Nothing at all any more. No more Minneapolis, no more rockets, no more Earth."

Michael considered the lethal revelation and began to sob little dry sobs.

"Wait a moment," said Dad the next instant. "I'm giving you a lot more in exchange, Mike!"

"What?" Michael held off the tears, curious, but quite ready to continue in case Dad's further revelation was as disconcerting as the original.

"I'm giving you this city, Mike. It's yours."

"Mine?"

"For you and Robert and Timothy, all three of you, to own for yourselves."

Timothy bounded from the boat. "Look, guys, all for *us*! All of *that*!" He was playing the game with Dad, playing it large and playing it well. Later, after it was all over and things had settled, he could go off by himself and cry for ten minutes. But now it was still a game, still a family outing, and the other kids must be kept playing.

Mike jumped out with Robert. They helped Mom.

"Be careful of your sister," said Dad, and nobody knew what he meant until later.

They hurried into the great pink-stoned city, whispering among themselves, because dead cities have a way of making you want to whisper, to watch the sun go down.

"In about five days," said Dad quietly, "I'll go back down to where our rocket was and collect the food hidden in the ruins there and bring it here; and I'll hunt for Bert Edwards and his wife and daughters there."

"Daughters?" asked Timothy. "How many?"

"Four."

"I can see that'll cause trouble later." Mom nodded slowly.

"Girls." Michael made a face like an ancient Martian stone image. "Girls."

"Are they coming in a rocket too?"

"Yes. If they make it. Family rockets are made for travel to the Moon, not Mars. We were lucky we got through."

"Where did you get the rocket?" whispered Timothy, for the other boys were running ahead.

"I saved it. I saved it for twenty years, Tim. I had it hidden away, hoping I'd never have to use it. I suppose I should have given it to the government for the war, but I kept thinking about Mars...."

"And a picnic!"

"Right. This is between you and me. When I saw everything was finishing on Earth, after I'd waited until the last moment, I packed us up. Bert Edwards had a ship hidden, too, but we decided it would be safer to take off separately, in case anyone tried to shoot us down."

"Why'd you blow up the rocket, Dad?"

"So we can't go back, ever. And so if any of those evil men ever come to Mars they won't know we're here."

"Is that why you look up all the time?"

"Yes, it's silly. They won't follow us, ever. They haven't anything to follow with. I'm being too careful, is all."

Michael came running back. "Is this really *our* city, Dad?"

"The whole darn planet belongs to us, kids. The whole darn planet."

They stood there, King of the Hill, Top of the Heap, Ruler of All They Surveyed, Unimpeachable Monarchs and Presidents, trying to understand what it meant to own a world and how big a world really was.

Night came quickly in the thin atmosphere, and Dad left them in the square by the pulsing fountain, went down to the boat, and came walking back carrying a stack of paper in his big hands.

He laid the papers in a clutter in an old courtyard and set them afire. To keep warm, they crouched around the blaze and laughed, and Timothy saw the little letters leap like frightened animals when the flames touched and engulfed them. The papers crinkled like an old man's skin, and the cremation surrounded innumerable words:

"GOVERNMENT BONDS; Business Graph, 2030; Religious Prejudice: An Essay; The Science of Logistics; Problems of the Pan-American Unity; Stock Report for July 3, 2029; The War Digest..."

Dad had insisted on bringing these papers for this purpose. He sat there and fed them into the fire, one by one, with satisfaction, and told his children what it all meant.

"It's time I told you a few things. I don't suppose it was fair, keeping so much from you. I don't know if you'll understand, but I have to talk, even if only part of it gets over to you."

He dropped a leaf in the fire.

"I'm burning a way of life, just like that way of life is being burned clean of Earth right now. Forgive me if I talk like a politician. I am, after all, a former state governor, and I was honest and they hated me for it. Life on Earth never settled down to doing anything very good. Science ran too far ahead of us too quickly, and the people got lost in a mechanical wilderness, like children making over pretty things, gadgets, helicopters, rockets; emphasizing the wrong items, emphasizing machines instead of how to run the machines. Wars got bigger and bigger and finally killed Earth. That's what the silent radio means. That's what we ran away from.

"We were lucky. There aren't any more rockets left. It's time you knew this isn't a fishing trip at all. I put off telling you. Earth is gone. Interplanetary travel won't be back for centuries, maybe never. But that way of life proved itself wrong and strangled itself with its own hands. You're young. I'll tell you this again every day until it sinks in."

He paused to feed more papers to the fire.

"Now we're alone. We and a handful of others who'll land in a few days. Enough to start over. Enough to turn away from all that back on Earth and strike out on a new line—"

The fire leaped up to emphasize his talking. And then all the papers were gone except one. All the laws and beliefs of Earth were burnt into small hot ashes which soon would be carried off in a wind.

Timothy looked at the last thing that Dad tossed in the fire. It was a map of the World, and it wrinkled and distorted itself hotly and went—flimpf—and was gone like a warm, black butterfly. Timothy turned away.

"Now I'm going to show you the Martians," said Dad. "Come on, all of you. Here, Alice." He took her hand.

Michael was crying loudly, and Dad picked him up and carried him, and they walked down through the ruins toward the canal.

The canal. Where tomorrow or the next day their future wives would come up in a boat, small laughing girls now, with their father and mother.

The night came down around them, and there were stars. But Timothy couldn't find Earth. It had already set. That was something to think about.

A night bird called among the ruins as they walked. Dad said, "Your mother and I will try to teach you. Perhaps we'll fail. I hope not. We've had a good lot to see and learn from. We planned this trip years ago, before you were born. Even if there hadn't been a war we would have come to Mars, I think, to live and form our own standard of living. It would have been another century before Mars would have been really poisoned by the Earth civilization. Now, of course—"

They reached the canal. It was long and straight and cool and wet and reflective in the night.

"I've always wanted to see a Martian," said Michael. "Where are they, Dad? You promised."

"There they are," said Dad, and he shifted Michael on his shoulder and pointed straight down.

The Martians were there. Timothy began to shiver.

The Martians were there—in the canal—reflected in the water. Timothy and Michael and Robert and Mom and Dad.

The Martians stared back up at them for a long, long silent time from the rippling water....

Part Two

Additional Materials

How I Wrote My Book

In 1944 I was reading Sinclair Lewis, Hemingway, Steinbeck, Willa Cather, Sherwood Anderson and John Dos Passos. I wondered then if the same sort of human, interesting people couldn't be carried off to Mars. I wondered, for instance, what would happen to a Steinbeck man, a Cather woman, a Hemingway tough, suddenly confronted with 50 million miles of space, the most immense loneliness in man's history, and the task of providing food, shelter, and nourishment for the spirit of his fellow men. I decided it was worth trying. In the autumn of 1944, I set out to do it.

I decided first of all that there would be certain elements of similarity between the invasion of Mars and the invasion of the Wild West in the years from 1840 until 1900. I had heard from my father's lips, and my grandfather's, stories of varied adventures in the West, even in the late year of 1908, when things were empty, still, and lonely. So I knew that Mars, in reality, would be that new horizon which Steinbeck's Billy Buck mused upon when he stood upon the shore of the pacific and the 'Going West' was over, and the adventurers were left with nothing else to do but simmer down.

The idea of jumping off to the other planets of our system is not only tremendous but self-propagating and unending. There is no limit to man's horizons and thinking in space. There is not one West there, but a billion Wests, a billion compass points where the rugged individual, the he-man, and yes, even the poet and writer, can go in search of a space huge enough to flex his muscles or indulge his brain in a little much-needed silence and isolation. Man will always be picking up and moving on, and space will give him the necessaries whereby if the civilization follows too close at his boot-heels, he can toss his belongings into a sack, and, technology willing, rocket off to some other planet, some other star.

I decided that space could offer all things to all men. I decided that Mars could be a symbol of haven to old people, riches to young bucks, beauty to philosophers, adventure to adventurers. It could be a new field to open out the questions of God to the man of good faith. It would be a field day for anthropologists, a heyday for mineralogists, a proving ground for psychologists, and a wonderful vacation for Mr. and Mrs. Joe Smith from Ashtabula.

I decided that Mars could not be anything like a crystal ball into which the people traveling there could see their future. I decided that Mars would be nothing more nor less than a mirror in which Earth Man would be reflected, twice as large as life, with all of his wonders, beauties and terrors, his petty politics, his ravening greeds, and simple faiths. He would find no more and no less on Mars, then what he brought

in his pocket and in his heart. Therefore, most Martian invaders were doomed to disappointment, for I knew that man, no matter how fast he traveled, might easily outdistance the speed of sound, but could never outdistance the speed of his wrong political decisions, his past, or the atom bomb. Running away from Earth to escape responsibility from the mess he had made of things would only involve mankind more deeply in their guilt, and so they would find, reflected one way or another, those troubles waiting for them, like unwanted children, on Mars.

There is an interpretation of the Einstein theory I believe (not being a scientist) that says space is curved. Some writers in the imaginative field have carried this on to the point where a character traveling into space for twenty trillion miles into the macrocosmos winds up in his own house on Earth, in the microscopic cells of the sunflowers there. Al Jolson put it very well years ago with a song, "Back in Your Own Back Yard". Go to Mars, go to Venus, but don't expect anything but human problems if you take humans with you.

Once I had clarified overall philosophical factors, once I realized that space travel per se was not going to bathe man in the light of the Lord and henceforward allow him to act like Little Eva in *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, I was well on my way to plotting, in separate links and episodes the parts of the narrative that, five years later, would result in *The Martian Chronicles.*

The first thing I knew I must set myself to doing was to insure the quality of everything in the book. Then I knew that this book must not be rushed, it must take its own sweet time to finish itself up, and I would need anywhere from three to five years to do it in. Each of the stories, concerning different people who went to Mars must be individual enough, and strong enough, to stand as stories alone, so I could sell them to magazines and thus support myself while finishing the rest of the book. And yet each story must be a part and parcel of the whole, so when the time came to finish the book and tie up the loose threads, I would be able to do it with a minimum of psychological or mechanical strain. Each story then was written in five to eight drafts over a period of two years for each story. In other words I would work on a story for a week and then put it away in my files to cool for a period of six months, when I would take it out again, benefiting by a new objectivity, and rewrite it. This process continued until I was satisfied with a story, two years later, and sent it out. In the meantime, each intervening week was taken up with other stories, which, in turn, went back to my file to wait out a five or six month interval.

Let me explain here that I feel that an author has a double responsibility, to his work, and to himself. I believe each story must have a rest, and that the author himself must be protected from his own ennui. After you have belabored a story for a week and given it a fairly good first draft, then it is only fair and right, the following Monday, to start something and say 'damn and hell' to last week's work. This is not a mechanical Ford assembly-line technique, but only the sensible thing for a thinking writer to do. A familiar story, a story you have worked on for many days, soon hides its true face behind a mist of prejudice, tiredness, and boredom. Better to let it sleep and collect material unto itself, in your subconscious, for six months. A writer deserves to entertain himself as well as his public. The only way to insure this is by starting each

Monday fresh with some story you haven't seen for months, or beginning an entirely new one.

This system will not work for everyone. Some people are psychologically incapable of putting a story away for many months. It hangs heavy in their conscience, it irritates and bothers them, and there is nothing for it but that they drudge through four more drafts, immediately, and get it out. All well and good. But for the writer who feels that he cannot bear to look that story in the face again tomorrow morning, my method provides blessed respite.

Of course, it takes about a year to get a system of this sort going, to get a mine of material field and forgotten, so that you can return, refreshed, and mine the lode at your discretion. The answer to this is to start young. I have been lucky, for I started filing away stories when I was 17 years old, and now have a monstrous backlog of 2nd, 3rd and 4th drafts on stories that are good, bad, or indifferent now, but that some day, some month, some year, will turn into what I hope will be good stories.

The most important thing about a system, if you can call it that, of this sort, is the originality it allows the writer. You have time to think a story over and add those telling details that make the difference between just a story and a story by "Mr. X."

If this system still sounds mechanical and too self-conscious to you, consider that under it I was able to finish an average of only 3 stories a year for 5 years. Certainly not a great output, but one enabling me to give time and thought to each story. At the same time, utilizing the same consideration to each individual story, I was able to finish about 14 stories each year on which to survive financially, but each of these had the same care and time taken with them, and were never slanted for any market.

Here I must pause and deviate once more, concerning this business of 'slanting' for a market. I believe that writing has to do with a writer's personality reacting to the material at hand. He has no business reacting to the stories in a magazine at hand, or reacting to a formula at hand. His total intelligence must be invested in knowing what his true reactions are to a given situation. If he begins to react as he thinks editors wish him to react, he is over, done, finished and dead before he starts. Other writers may write what the editors think they should think about Man facing and conquering the stars, but the individual work of the future in this field will be done by men who ask "What do I really think, what do I really feel? What do *I*, Smith, know of my fears and hopes, if I should go to Mars tonight."

I followed that formula exactly. I wondered what Ray Bradbury would do if he were taken unceremoniously off and dumped 50 million miles from his safe, circumscribed little existence. I knew that I would be afraid of many things, loneliness, time, even existence, so far away. I knew that I would fear for not only Earth men, but Martians also, for Martians would be the first cousins to Indians and I recollected only too well what we had done to the Indians. There were both sides to be considered, the logistics of parceling up and crating off religion to Mars, and there was the racial problem to consider, and the problem of the sociologist who knows everything about everyone and would like to run everything with neat charts and graphs. I knew that I was suspicious of science, of the so-called advancements of our civilization. I suppose I knew that I was a trifle old-fashioned and romantic about some things, perhaps

I imagined that man should slow down a little when he moved out into space, take life a little easier, enjoy himself. But Earth man, as now constructed, could not do that. He would have to take with him his hot-dog stands, his television, and his atom bombs, and this very insistence upon 'business as usual' would, in the end, trip him up, and bring his excursion to nothing.

All in all, I tried to write a human story, for if stories of the future (I refuse to call them science-fiction) are not about truly human reactions to inhuman situations the result of a swift-moving technology and a slow-moving individual, then they are not worth reading or writing at all. Mr. Raymond Chandler of the mystery writers wishes to return the mystery to the man in the street. It is, was, and shall always be my hope to give the fiction of the future back to every man rather than to any one special clique or group of readers, scientist or otherwise.

Finally, s-f is the only remaining field today open to writers with ideas. You can dare to think in your stories about such things as materialism, commercialism, television, fascism, as long as you are entertaining. That is important, you can't write soapbox pamphlets, the stories must breathe out of the characters' nostrils, and move with their movings, there is no time to stop and lecture. The story must tell what it has to tell, entertain, divert, and leave behind it the seed, the kernel of thought you wish to germinate later. If you are worried about the vanished pedestrian, stories about the future can help you talk about it. If you wonder whether machinery is good or bad for man, here is your theatre of argument. As long as your imagination is equal to your indignation, as Mr. Christopher Isherwood put it, you are on safe ground. When your imagination fails and you are left pointing out your sociological indignation, you are a rabble-rouser alone in Union Square at sunset, deserted, and deservedly so.

And best of all you can write in this field without anyone calling you a Communist. This is the last refuge for people who want to think at a time when thinking seems to be looked upon as something pink by too many exponents of McCarthyism in this country. I have yet to be called a Communist, even though I have written stories against book-burning, excessive mechanization, police and thought control and fascism in high places. I imagine no one has thought to call me a Communist because I have laid the stories in the future.

I am therefore exempted from suspicion as some sort of day-dreaming crackpot. After all, he's talking about fifty years from now, he can't mean us. But they're wrong of course. I do mean us, I do mean you, and the man next to you and the man behind you. The future is going to be full of McCarthys and Hitlers and Stalins and Francos of one color or another. I'd like to catch them in a cube of plastic that you can turn over and look at from all sides. That's what a story should be. I want to dangle all the petty little trouble-makers and murderers by the napes of their necks for everyone to see. I don't want pressure groups censoring me or my work or telling me what to see, do, think, feel, or dream, be they SPCA or DAR or the Women's Shopping League of America. As a writer I respect the printed word, as a human being I want to be left alone and I want to leave others alone and be sure they are left alone by others. I don't want book burning here, or blacklistings or smearings or favoritism. And one of the few ways I have to do something about this is through writing about the Future,

taking people and their problems today and blowing them up just one size larger. And if I ever get to preaching too much in my stories, I deserve to be kicked out of place, someone else deserves to come along who can tell a story, entertain, and tell it well. Futuristic writing is, first last and always, entertaining. If it makes people think, so much the better.

I believe that the realistic novels of this day are sordid because they are not real. I believe that instead of showing the face of reality, they show nothing at all but a shabby skeleton, half a bearded cheek, a waxy ear, a pendulous breast, a glazed eye. I believe the failure of the realistic novel today lies in not knowing the characters they work with. For if they knew them they would understand them, and, in understanding them would paint a portrait of them so complete in every facet, that the characters would be sympathetic and pitiable instead of contemptible and hideous and vulgar. If one must write of sadistic brutes and monosyllabic bawds, one must show them in the round, one must never forget that in the end the reader should think, "Ah, there but for the grace of God, go I." Instead of, "How revolting!" The rat-like individual in the black midnight doorway, stuffing heroin into his veins with a safety-pin improvised as a hypodermic, is not the stuff of Shakespearean tragedy, but, once investigated *en toto*, he could be a study, at the very least, in steps going down from, perhaps, the very moment of his birth. It is the failure of the realistic novelist to realize, or put over, the fact of some essential decency of a man at an earlier age, as against his decadence in later life, that causes most people to turn from realism with a shudder. To achieve validity, a study in decadence must be painted upon the old structure of cleanliness, devotion, pride and moral courage, so that the tragedy **[illegible]** the loss of noble virtues and what stature, no matter how small, each man contains of himself.

R.B. October 17, 1950

Part Three

The Other Martian Tales of Ray Bradbury

Undiscovered Mars, Unseen Bradbury

BY JOE HILL

I was thirteen the first time I read Bradbury, one of his later novels, *Death is a Lonely Business.* That first encounter with his prose was a shock of delight and discovery, on par with the moment in *The Wizard of Oz* when Dorothy steps out of her black-and-white house and into a world of impossible color. It wasn't like the kinds of things I read for school, wasn't like writing at all. It was like fireworks. Bradbury's sentences went off in a series of thunderclaps, throwing sparks. Other writers were whey-faced schoolteachers with droning voices. Bradbury was an overgrown kid with dirt on his hands, a pocketful of matches, and a box of bottle rockets. Other writers wanted to argue, make points, educate. Bradbury wanted to blow things up in pretty gouts of fire.

I went from *Death* straight into *The Martian Chronicles*, and then *Something Wicked This Way Comes.* I started writing just like him; I couldn't help it. By then I already had notions of myself as a writer, had even sent out my first professional submission, and duly collected my first rejection slip. What I lacked were the things every novice lacks: fresh language, fresh ideas, an identity I could call my own. So I borrowed from Bradbury. All of it. The language, the ideas, the identity. I began writing 3,000 word prose-poems, flurries of garish writing and fool-ass concepts that I imagined had the reach and energy of Bradbury's stories. They had energy, I'll give them that.

My condition was a common one. I had a bad case of Bradbury flu, and I'm not the only guy to ever catch it. I think a lot of young writers with a yen for science fiction and dark fantasy go through a Bradbury period, or a Lovecraft period, or a King period, or all three. Bradbury himself has often noted that imitation is an important and natural part of any writer's development, no shame in it, unless you never move on. Eventually you have to struggle for your own true sentences and your own true ideas. Writing teachers talk about "finding your own voice" as if learning to become a writer is somehow like hunting down a lost hat in a cluttered attic, and once you find it, the job is as simple as wearing the thing. The more complicated truth is you have to hunt for your voice day-in, day-out; you have to constantly claw through the clutter, searching for yourself.

Bradbury always makes it look simple, always makes it look easy. That's a big part of why so many young writers are drawn to imitate him, I think. The effortless nature of his writing fools people into believing his stories were in fact effortless to write. And we want it to be easy. In *The Martian Chronicles*, the golden-skinned people of Mars soar about on silk canopies, lifted aloft by flocks of firebirds. Bradbury produces

much the same feeling in his readers. You are sailed into and through his stories from the first sentence, suspended in mid-air by Bradbury's silky imagery, without the slightest awareness of how hard the firebird under you is thrashing his feathers to keep the both of you from crashing. You float. He burns and beats his wings for all he's worth. I'm saying what looks easy is usually not. Imitating Bradbury is a cakewalk. *Being* Bradbury is something only one person has ever successfully been able to pull off.

For every elegant and perfectly placed sentence in *The Martian Chronicles*, there were a hundred other sentences Bradbury sweated over, day after week after month, fighting for something that belonged to him. The paperback edition of *Chronicles* is barely 200 pages and could be read in a day (and a very good day that would be). But before Bradbury was capable of writing them, he honed his craft over the course of ten thousand pages that have never been published and never will. Every writer has early immature work, work they did in the process of shaping their particular literary identity. We don't need to think about that work, although it is helpful to know that Bradbury had to plow those first fields just like every other writer who ever daydreamed of seeing his name on the cover of a book.

What is of interest is the writing that Bradbury did in the first full flush of his powers, testing his limits, lining up his rockets... making the choices that would make the novel, his first. Every choice a gamble, a bet: on himself. With a great work like *The Martian Chronicles*—a work which both defines a genre, and the man who wrote it—there are thousands of these choices, and often a small library of brilliant material that was set aside. Why would anyone leave out brilliant material? Because standalone brilliance is not—is never—enough. In some cases the stories in question didn't fit with the underlying ideas of the overall piece. In others, certain astonishing ideas were left on the table, because Bradbury came up with a twist that made the astonishing even moreso. There were passages of indescribable power that pointed the narrative in the wrong direction and so they had to go. There were irresistible concepts that were never-the-less resisted, because they would've created dangerous interior contradictions.

Here is some of that material, stories that hint at the bare-knuckled brawler behind the gentle magician, that show the sweat and blood behind the slight-of-hand. Many are ingenious classics of the imagination, pieces most storytellers would've given their left hand to have authored. There is, of course, "Way in the Middle of the Air," in which a giddy young Ray Bradbury leaves racist America to eat rocket ash. "Way in the Middle" actually *did* appear in the original version of *Chronicles*, but was later set aside when desegregation made it less relevant. There is "The Disease," a sweet, chilled shot of arsenic that revisits the jealous husband from "Ylla," and which was presumably left out of the collection only because it broke up Bradbury's rhythm. There is "The Love Affair," a largely unknown story of sexual fixation and alien desire which is, for my money, an electrifying masterpiece that should've been in the original book. I can only assume it was abandoned because it toes the line of what was considered filthy in 1950, that era of heavy-breathing censorship. There are dizzying fragments like "Jemima True" and there are ripping Wild-West-by-way-of-Mars-entertainments that never found their way into the final book, because they explore themes already examined in *Chronicles*, and there wasn't a seat for everyone in the rocket.

The stories published in the original *Martian Chronicles* tell a narrative of exploration and human transformation, in a fantastical setting. The following stories tell a very different narrative, the story of a young writer with one-of-a-kind gifts, pushing the edge of envelope, and taking the first of a dozen great literary leaps. The underlying themes, however, are the same. The human transformed in the following pages is Ray Bradbury himself. The landscape explored was his own heart and imagination. The setting is as secret and mysterious as Mars itself, a private place where hard work was done, and personal discoveries were made. The end result was Ray Bradbury as the world knows him, the kid from Waukegan, Illinois with the box of bottle rockets and dirt on his hands and a kind of happy madness in his eyes.

—Joe Hill, New Hampshire, '09.

The Lonely Ones

They ate six suppers in the open, talking back and forth over the small campfire. The light shone high on the silver rocket in which they had traveled across space. From a long way off in the blue hills, their campfire seemed like a star that had landed beside the long Martian canals under the clear and windless Martian sky.

On the sixth night the two men sat by the fire, looking tensely in all directions.

"Cold?" asked Drew, for the other was shivering.

"What?" Smith looked at his arms. "No."

Drew looked at Smith's forehead. It was covered with sweat.

"Too warm?"

"No, not that either."

"Lonely?"

"Maybe." His hand jerked as he put another piece of wood on the fire.

"Game of cards?"

"Can't concentrate."

Drew listened to Smith's quick shallow breathing. "We've our information. Each day we took pictures and ore samples. We're about loaded. Why don't we start the trip home tonight?"

Smith laughed. "You're not *that* lonely, are you?"

"Cut it."

They shifted their boots in the cool sand. There was no wind. The fire burned steadily, straight up, fed by the oxygen hose from the ship. They themselves wore transparent glass masks over their faces, very thin, through which a soft oxygen film pulsed up from the oxygen vests under their jackets. Drew checked his wrist dial. Six more hours of oxygen in his jacket. Fine.

He pulled out his ukulele and started to strum on it carelessly, eyes half closed, leaning back to look at the stars.

The girl of my dreams is the sweetest girl
Of all the girls I know—
Each sweet coed, like a rainbow red
Fades in the afterglow.
The blue of her eyes and the gold of her hair....

The sound of the ukulele came up Drew's arms into his earphones. Smith could not hear the instrument, only Drew's singing. The atmosphere was too thin.

"She's the sweetheart of Sigma Chi—"

"Aw, cut it out!" cried Smith.

"What's eating you?"

"I said cut it out, is all!" Smith sat back, glaring at the other man.

"Okay, okay, don't get excited."

Drew put the ukulele down and lay back, thinking. He knew what it was. It was in him, too. The cold loneliness, the midnight loneliness, the loneliness of distance and time and space, of stars and travel and months and days.

Only too well he remembered Anna's face looking in at him through the space port of the rocket a minute before blast-off time. It was like a vivid, clear-cut blue cameo—the blue round glass and her lovely face, her hand uplifted to wave, her smiling lips and her bright eyes. She had kissed her hand to him. Then she had vanished.

He looked idly over at Smith. Smith's eyes were closed. He was turning over a thought of his own in his mind. Marguerite, of course. Wonderful Marguerite, the brown eyes and the soft brown hair. Sixty million miles away on some improbable world where they had been born.

"I wonder what they're doing tonight?" Drew said.

Smith opened his eyes and looked across the fire. Without even questioning Drew's meaning, he replied, "Going to a television concert, swimming, playing badminton, lots of things."

Drew nodded. He withdrew into himself again and he felt the sweat starting to come out in his hands and his face. He began to tremble and there was a shrill whining emotion deep inside himself. He didn't want to sleep tonight. It would be like other nights. Out of nothing, the lips and the warmth and the dream. And, all too soon, the empty morning, the arising into the nightmare of reality.

He jumped up violently.

Smith fell back, staring.

"Let's take a walk, do something," said Drew heartily.

"All right."

They walked through the pink sands of the empty sea bottom, saying nothing, only walking. Drew felt part of the tightness vanish. He cleared his throat.

"Suppose," he said, "just to be supposing, of course, you met up with a Martian woman? Now. Some time in the next hour?"

Smith snorted. "Don't be silly. There aren't any."

"But just suppose."

"I don't know," replied Smith, looking ahead as he walked. He put his head down and rubbed his hand along the thin warm glass mask over his face. "Marguerite's waiting for me in New York."

"And Anna's waiting for me. But let's be practical. Here we are, two very human men, a year away from Earth, cold, lonely, isolated, in need of consolation, hand-holding. No wonder we're brooding over the women we left behind."

"It's plain silly to brood, and we ought to quit it. There's no women around anyway, drat it!"

They walked onward for a distance.

"Anyway," Smith continued at last, after a time of thinking, "If we did find a woman here, I'm sure Marguerite would be the first to comprehend the situation and forgive me."

"Are you sure?"

"Absolutely!"

"Or are you rationalizing?"

"No!"

"Let me show you something, then. Turn back. Over there." Drew took Smith's arm and guided him back and to one side about fifty paces. "The reason I brought the whole subject up is this." He pointed.

Smith gasped.

A footprint lay like a tiny soft valley in the sand.

The two men bent, put their fingers eagerly down, brushing nervously to each side of it. Their breath hissed in their nostrils. Smith's eyes glittered.

They looked into each other's faces for a long time.

"A woman's footstep," cried Smith.

"Perfect in every detail," said Drew, nodding solemnly. "I happen to know. I once worked in a shoe store. I'd know a woman's print anywhere. Perfect, perfect!"

They swallowed the thickened knots in their dry throats. Their hearts began to beat wildly.

Smith opened and closed his hands into fists. "Glory, it's small! Look at the toes! Gosh; it's dainty!"

He stood up and looked ahead, eyes squinted. Then, crying out, he began to run. "Here's another, and another. More. They go on, that way!"

"Take it easy," Drew caught up with him. He took hold of Smith's arm. "Where you think you're going?"

"Let go, blast it!" Smith pointed. "I'm following them up, of course."

"What about Marguerite?"

"This is a devil of a time to talk of her. Let go before I crack you one!"

Musingly. Drew dropped his hand. "Okay. Go ahead."

They ran together....

Fresh footsteps, fresh and deep and delicately defined. Footsteps that rushed, swirled. pelted on before them, coming and going, alone, across the dry sea bottom. Glance at the wrist watch. Five minutes, then. Hurry. Rush. Run. Drew panted, laughing. Ridiculous. Silly. Two men plunging forward. Really, if it weren't such a

lonely, serious thing, he would sit down and laugh until he cried. Two supposedly intelligent men, two Robinson Crusoes racing after a feminine and as yet invisible girl Friday! Ha!

"What's funny?" shouted Smith, far ahead.

"Nothing. Watch the time. Oxygen gives out, you know."

"We've plenty."

"Watch it, though!"

Did she realize when she came by here, thought Drew amusedly, putting her footfalls so delicately into the earth, that by so doing, so innocently laying her gentle small feet, she would cause a crisis among men? No. Totally unaware. Totally!

He must run anyway and keep up with that insane Smith. Silly, silly. And yet—not so silly.

As Drew ran, a warmness filled his head. After all, it would be swell to sit by the fire tonight beside a beautiful woman, holding her hand, kissing her and touching her.

"What if she's blue?"

Smith turned as he ran. "What?"

"What if her skin's blue? Like the hills? What then?"

"Blast you, Drew!"

"Ha!" Drew shouted his laugh and they pelted into an old river draw and along a canal, both lying empty in the seasonless time.

The footprints moved delicately on and on to the foothills. They had to stop when they reached the climb.

"Dibs," said Drew, eyes sharp and yellow.

"What?"

"I said 'Dibs on her.' That means I get to speak to her first. Remember when we were kids? We said 'Dibs.' Okay. I just said 'Dibs.' That makes it official."

Smith was not smiling.

"What's wrong, Smith? 'Fraid of competition?" said Drew.

Smith did not speak.

"I've got quite a profile," Drew pointed out. "Also, I'm four inches taller."

Smith looked coldly at him. His eyes were still.

"Yes, sir, competition," Drew went on. "Tell you what, Drew—if she's got a friend, I'll let you have the friend."

"Shut up," said Smith glaring at him.

Drew stopped smiling and stood back. "Look here, Smith, you better take it slow. You're getting all het up. I don't like to see you this way. Everything's been fine until now."

"I'll act anyway I please. You just keep out of my business. After all, I found the footprints!"

"Say that again."

"Well, you found them, maybe, but it was *my* idea to follow them up!"

"*Was* it?" Drew said slowly.

"You know it was."

"*Do* I?"

"Holy Pete, a year in space, no company, nothing, traveling, and now when something like this happens, someone human—"

"Someone *feminine*!"

Smith cocked his fist. Drew caught it, twisted it, slapped Smith's face.

"Wake up!" he shouted into the blank face. "Wake up!" He seized Smith's shirt front. He shook him like a kid. "Listen, listen, you fool! Maybe she's somebody else's woman. Think of that. Where there's a Martian woman, there's going to be a Martian man, you chump."

"Let go of me!"

"Think of it, you idiot, that's all." Drew gave Smith a shove. Smith toppled, almost fell, reached for his gun, thought better of it, shoved it back.

But Drew had seen the gesture. He looked at Smith. "So it's come to that, has it? You really are in a bad way, aren't you? The old cave man himself."

"Shut up!" Smith started to walk on, climbing. "You don't understand."

"No, I've been nowhere the last year. I've been home with Anna every night. I've been warm and safe in New York. You went on the trip all by your lonely little self!" Drew snorted violently and swore. "You sure are an egocentric little squirt!"

They climbed a hill of sand and were among other hills where the footprints led them. They found an abandoned fireplace, charred sticks of wood, a small metal tin which had once, from its arrangement, contained oxygen to feed the fire. They looked new.

"She can't be much further on." Smith was ready to drop, but still he ran. He slugged his feet into the sand and gasped.

I wonder what she's like, thought Drew, moving in his thoughts, freely, wonderingly. I wonder if she's tall and slender or small and very thin. I wonder what color eyes, what color hair she has? I wonder what her voice is like? Sweet, high? Or soft and very low?

I wonder a lot of things. So does Smith. Smith's wondering, too, now. Listen to him wonder and gasp and run and wonder some more. This isn't any good. It'll lead us to something bad, I know. Why do we go on? A silly question. We go on, of course, because we're only human, no more, no less.

I just hope, he thought, that she doesn't have snakes for hair.

"A cave!"

They had come to the side of a small mountain, into which a cave went back through darkness. The footprints vanished within.

Smith snatched forth his electric torch and sent the beam inside, flashing it swiftly about, grinning with apprehension. He moved forward cautiously, his breath rasping in the earphones.

"It won't be long now," said Drew.

Smith didn't look at him.

They walked together, elbows bumping. Every time Drew tried to draw ahead, Smith grunted and increased his pace, his face angry with color.

The tunnel twisted, but the footprints still appeared as they flicked the torch beam down.

Suddenly they came out into an immense cave. Across it, by a campfire which had gone out, a figure lay.

"There she is!" shouted Smith. "There she is!"

"Dibs," whispered Drew quietly.

Smith turned, the gun was in his hand. "Get out," he said.

"What?" Drew blinked at the gun.

"You heard what I said, get out!"

"Now, wait a minute—"

"Get back to the ship, wait for me there!"

"If you think you're going to—"

"I'll count to ten, if you haven't moved by then, I'll burn you where you stand—"

"You're crazy!"

"One, two, three, better start moving."

"Listen to me, Smith, for Heaven's sake!"

"Four, five, six, I warned you—ah!"

The gun went off.

The bullet struck Drew in the hip, whirling him about to fall face down, crying out with pain. He lay in darkness.

"I didn't mean it, Drew, I didn't!" Smith cried. "It went off; my finger, my hand, nervous; I didn't mean it!" A figure bent down in the blazing light, turned him over. "I'll fix you up, I'm sorry. I'll get her to help us. Just a second!"

The pain in his side, Drew lay watching as the torch turned and Smith rushed loudly across the long cave toward the sleeping figure by the black fire. He heard Smith call out once or twice, saw him approach and bend down to the figure, touch it.

For a long time, Drew waited.

Smith turned the figure over.

From a distance, Drew heard Smith say, "She's dead."

"What!" called Drew. With fumbling hands he was taking out a small kit of medicine. He broke open a vial of white powder which he swallowed. The pain in his side stopped instantly. Now he went about bandaging the wound. It was bad enough, but not too bad. In the middle distance he saw Smith standing all alone, his torch senselessly in his numb hand, looking down at the woman's figure.

Smith came back and sat down and looked at nothing.

"She's—she's been dead a long long time."

"But the footprints? What about them?"

"This world, of course, this world. We didn't stop to think. We just ran. I just ran. Like a fool. This world, I didn't think until now. Now I know."

"What is it?"

"There's no wind, nothing. No seasons, no rain, no storms, no nothing. Ten thousand years ago, in a dying world, that woman there walked across the sands, alone. Maybe the last one alive. With a few oxygen tins to keep her going. Something happened to the planet. The atmosphere drained off into space. No wind, no oxygen, no seasons. And her walking alone." Smith shaped it in his mind before telling it quietly to Drew, not looking at him. "And she came to this cave and lay down and died."

"Ten thousand years ago?"

"Ten thousand years. And she's been here ever since. Perfect. Lying here, waiting for us to come and make fools of ourselves. A cosmic joke. Ah, yes! Very funny."

"But the footprints?"

"No wind. No rain. The footprints look just as fresh as the day she made them, naturally. Everything looks new and fresh. Even her. Except there's something about her. Just by seeing her you know she's been dead a long long while. I don't know what it is."

His voice faded away.

Suddenly he remembered Drew. "My gun. You. Can I help?"

"I got it all dressed. It was an accident. Let's put it that way."

"Does it hurt?"

"No."

"You won't try and kill me for this?"

"Shut your mouth. Your finger slipped."

"It did—it really did! I'm sorry."

"I know it did. Shut up." Drew finished packing the wound. "Give me a hand now, we've got to get back to the ship." Smith helped him grunt to his feet and stand swaying. "Now walk me over so I can take a look at Miss Mars, ten thousand B.C. After all that running and this trouble I ought to get a look at her, anyway."

Smith helped him slowly over to stand above the sprawling form. "Looks like she's only sleeping," said Smith. "But she's dead, awful dead. Isn't she pretty?"

She looks just like Anna, thought Drew, with a sense of shock. Anna sleeping there, ready to wake and smile and say hello.

"She looks just like Marguerite," Smith said.

Drew's mouth twitched. "Marguerite?" He hesitated. "Yes. Y-yes, I guess, she does." He shook his head. "All depends on how you look at it. I was just thinking myself—"

"What?"

"Never mind. Let her lie. Leave her there. Now, we've got to hurry. Back to the ship for us."

"I wonder who she was?"

"We'll never know. A princess maybe. A stenographer in some ancient city, a dancing maid? Come on, Smith."

They made it back to the rocket in half an hour, slowly and painfully.

"Aren't we fools, though? Really prime fools?"

The rocket door slammed.

The rocket fired up on fountains of red and blue flame.

Below, the sand was stirred and blasted and blown. The footprints, for the first time in ten thousands years were disturbed. They blew away in fine particles. When the fire wind died, the prints were gone.

The Exiles

Their eyes were fire and the breath flamed out the witches' mouths as they bent to probe the caldron with greasy stick and bony finger.

"When shall we three meet again
In thunder, lightning, or in rain?"

They danced drunkenly on the shore of an empty sea, fouling the air with their three tongues, and burning it with their cats' eyes malevolently aglitter:

"Round about the cauldron go,
In the poison'd entrails throw....
Double, double, toil and trouble,
Fire burn, and cauldron bubble!"

They paused and cast a glance about. "Where's the crystal? Where's the needles?"
"Here!"
"Good."
"Is the yellow wax thickened?"
"Yes!"
"Pour it in the iron mold!"
"Is the wax figure done?" They shaped it like molasses adrip on their green hands.
"Shove the needle through the heart!"
"The crystal, the crystal, fetch it from the tarot bag. Dust it off, have a look!"
They bent to the crystal, their faces white.

See, see, see..."

A rocket ship moved through space from the planet Earth to the planet Mars. On the rocket ship men were dying.

The captain raised his head, tiredly. "We'll have to use the morphine."

"But, Captain—"

"You see yourself this man's condition." The captain lifted the wool blanket and the man restrained beneath the wet sheet moved and groaned. The air was full of sulphurous thunder.

"I saw it—I saw it—" The man opened his eyes and stared at the port where there were only black spaces, reeling stars, Earth far removed, and the planet Mars rising large and red. "I saw it—a bat, a huge thing, a bat with a man's face, spread over the front port. Fluttering and fluttering, fluttering and fluttering."

"Pulse?" asked the captain.

The orderly measured it. "One hundred and thirty."

"He can't go on with that. Use the morphine Come along, Smith."

They moved away. Suddenly the floor plates were laced with bone and white skulls that screamed. The captain did not dare look down, and over the screaming he said, "Is this where Perse is?" turning in at a hatch.

A white-smocked surgeon stepped away from a body. "I just don't understand it."

"How did Perse die?"

"We don't know, Captain. It wasn't his heart, his brain, or shock. He just—died."

The captain felt the doctor's wrist, which changed to a hissing snake and bit him. The captain did not flinch. "Take care of yourself. You've a pulse too."

The doctor nodded. "Perse complained of pains—needles, he said—in his wrists and legs. Said he felt like wax, melting. He fell. I helped him up. He cried like a child. Said he had a silver needle in his heart. He died. Here he is. We can repeat the autopsy for you. Everything's physically normal."

"That's impossible! He died of *something*!"

The captain walked to a port. He smelled of menthol and iodine and green soap on his polished and manicured hands. His white teeth were dentifriced, and his ears scoured to pinkness, as were his cheeks. His uniform was the color of new salt, and his boots were black mirrors shining below him. His crisp crew-cut hair smelled of sharp alcohol. Even his breath was sharp and new and clean. There was no spot to him. He was a fresh instrument, honed and ready, still hot from the surgeon's oven.

The men with him were from the same mold. One expected huge brass keys spiraling slowly from their backs. They were expensive, talented, well-oiled toys, obedient and quick.

The captain watched the planet Mars grow very large in space.

"We'll be landing in an hour on that damned place, Smith, did you see any bats, or have other nightmares?"

"Yes, sir. The month before our rocket took off from New York, sir. White rats biting my neck, drinking my blood. I didn't tell. I was afraid you wouldn't let me come on this trip."

"Never mind," sighed the captain. "I had dreams too. In all of my fifty years I never had a dream until that week before we took off from Earth. And then every night I dreamed I was a white wolf. Caught on a snowy hill. Shot with a silver bullet. Buried with a stake in my heart." He moved his head toward Mars. "Do you think, Smith, *they* know we're coming?"

"We don't know if there *are* Martian people, sir."

"Don't we? They began frightening us off eight weeks ago, before we started. They've killed Perse and Reynolds now. Yesterday they made Grenville go blind. How? I don't know. Bats, needles, dreams, men dying for no reason. I'd call it witch-

craft in another day. But this is the year 2120, Smith. We're rational men. This all can't be happening. But it is. Whoever they are, with their needles and their bats, they'll try to finish us all." He swung about. "Smith, fetch those books from my file. I want them when we land."

Two hundred books were piled on the rocket desk.

"Thank you, Smith. Have you glanced at them? Think I'm insane? Perhaps. It's a crazy hunch. At that last moment I ordered these books from the Historical Museum. Because of my dreams. Twenty nights I was stabbed, butchered, a screaming bat pinned to a surgical mat, a thing rotting underground in a black box, bad, wicked dreams. Our whole crew dreamed of witch-things and were-things, vampires and phantoms, things they *couldn't* know anything about. Why? Because books on such ghastly subjects were destroyed a century ago. By law. Forbidden for anyone to own the grisly volumes. These books you see here are the *last* copies, kept for historical purposes in the locked museum vaults."

Smith bent to read the dusty titles:

"*Tales of Mystery and Imagination*, by Edgar Allan Poe. *Dracula*, by Bram Stoker. *Frankenstein*, by Mary Shelley. *The Turn of the Screw*, by Henry James. *The Legend of Sleepy Hollow*, by Washington Irving. *Rappaccini's Daughter*, by Nathaniel Hawthorne. *An Occurrence at Owl Creek Bridge*, by Ambrose Bierce. *Alice in Wonderland*, by Lewis Carroll. *The Willows*, by Algernon Blackwood. *The Wizard of Oz*, by L. Frank Baum. *The Weird Shadow Over Innsmouth*, by H. P. Lovecraft. And more! Books by Walter de la Mare, Wakefield, Harvey, Wells, Asquith, Huxley—all forbidden authors. All burned in the same year that Halloween was outlawed and Christmas was banned! But, sir, what good are these to us on the rocket?"

"I don't know," sighed the captain, "yet."

The three hags lifted the crystal where the captain's image flickered, his tiny voice tinkling out of the glass.

"I don't know," sighed the captain, "yet."

The three witches glared redly into one another's faces.

"We haven't much time," said one.

"Better warn *Them* in the City."

"They'll want to know about the books. It doesn't look good. That fool of a captain!"

"In an hour they'll land their rocket."

The three hags shuddered and blinked up at the Emerald City by the edge of the dry Martian sea. In its highest window a small man held a blood-red drape aside. He watched the wastelands where the three witches fed their caldron and shaped the waxes. Farther along, ten thousand other blue fires and laurel incenses, black tobacco smokes and fireweeds, cinnamons and bone dusts rose soft as moths through the Martian night. The man counted the angry, magical fires. Then, as the three witches stared, he turned. The crimson drape, released, fell, causing the distant portal to wink, like a yellow eye.

Mr. Edgar Allan Poe stood in the tower window, a faint vapor of spirits upon his breath. "Hecate's friends are busy tonight," he said, seeing the witches, far below.

A voice behind him said, "I saw Will Shakespeare at the shore, earlier, whipping them on. All along the sea Shakespeare's army alone, tonight, numbers thousands: the three witches, Oberon, Hamlet's father, Puck—all, all of them—thousands! Good lord, a regular sea of people."

"Good William." Poe turned. He let the crimson drape fall shut. He stood for a moment to observe the raw stone room, the black-timbered table, the candle flame, the other man, Mr. Ambrose Bierce, sitting very idly there, lighting matches and watching them burn down, whistling under his breath, now and then laughing to himself.

"We'll have to tell Mr. Dickens now," said Mr. Poe.

"We've put it off too long. It's a matter of hours. Will you go down to his home with me, Bierce?"

Bierce glanced up merrily. "I've just been thinking—what'll happen to us?"

"If we can't kill the rocket men off, frighten them away, then we'll have to leave, of course. We'll go on to Jupiter and when they come to Jupiter, we'll go on to Saturn, and when they come to Saturn, we'll go to Uranus, or Neptune, and then on out to Pluto—"

"Where then?"

Mr. Poe's face was weary; there were fire coals remaining, fading, in his eyes, and a sad wildness in the way he talked, and a uselessness of his hands and the way his hair fell lanky over his amazing white brow. He was like a satan of some lost dark cause, a general arrived from a derelict invasion. His silky, soft, black mustache was worn away by his musing lips. He was so small his brow seemed to float, vast and phosphorescent, by itself, in the dark room.

"We have the advantages of superior forms of travel," he said. "We can always hope for one of their atomic wars, dissolution, the dark ages come again. The return of superstition. We could go back then to Earth, all of us, in one night." Mr. Poe's black eyes brooded under his round and luminant brow. He gazed at the ceiling. "So they're coming to ruin *this* world too? They won't leave *anything* undefiled, will they?"

"Does a wolf pack stop until it's killed its prey and eaten the guts? It should be quite a war. I shall sit on the side lines and be the scorekeeper. So many Earthmen boiled in oil, so many Mss. Found in Bottles burnt, so many Earthmen stabbed with needles, so many Red Deaths put to flight by a batter of hypodermic syringes—ha!"

Poe swayed angrily, faintly drunk with wine. "What did we do? Be *with* us, Bierce, in the name of God! Did we have a fair trial before a company of literary critics? No! Our books were plucked up by neat, sterile, surgeon's pliers, and flung into vats, to boil, to be killed of all their mortuary germs. Damn them all!"

"I find our situation amusing," said Bierce.

They were interrupted by a hysterical shout from the tower stair.

"Mr. Poe! Mr. Bierce!"

"Yes, yes, we're coming." Poe and Bierce descended to find a man gasping against the stone passage wall.

"Have you heard the news?" he cried immediately, clawing at them like a man about to fall over a cliff. "In an hour they'll land! They're bringing books with them—*old* books, the witches said! What're you doing in the tower at a time like this? Why aren't you acting?"

Poe said: "We're doing everything we can, Blackwood. You're new to all this. Come along, we're going to Mr. Charles Dickens' place—"

"—to contemplate our doom, our black doom," said Bierce, with a wink.

They moved down the echoing throats of the castle, level after dim green level, down into mustiness and decay and spiders and dreamlike webbing. "Don't worry," said Poe, his brow like a huge white lamp before them, descending, sinking. "All along the dead sea tonight I've called the others. Your friends and mine, Blackwood—Bierce. They're all there. The animals and the old women and the tall men with the sharp white teeth. The traps are waiting, the pits, yes, and the pendulums. The Red Death." Here he laughed quietly. "Yes, even the Red Death. I never thought—no, I never thought the time would come when a thing like the Red Death would actually be. But they asked for it, and they shall have it!"

"But are we strong enough?" wondered Blackwood.

"How strong is strong? They won't be prepared for us, at least. They haven't the imagination. Those clean young rocket men with their antiseptic bloomers and fish-bowl helmets, with their new religion. About their necks, on gold chains, scalpels. Upon their heads, a diadem of microscopes. In their holy fingers, steaming incense urns which in reality are only germicidal ovens for steaming out superstition. The names of Poe, Bierce, Hawthorne, Blackwood—blasphemy to their clean lips."

Outside the castle they advanced through a watery space, a tarn that was not a tarn, which misted before them like the stuff of nightmares. The air filled with wing sounds and a whirring, a motion of winds and blacknesses. Voices changed, figures swayed at campfires. Mr. Poe watched the needles knitting, knitting, knitting, in the firelight; knitting pain and misery, knitting wickedness into wax marionettes, clay puppets. The caldron smells of wild garlic and cayenne and saffron hissed up to fill the night with evil pungency.

"Get on with it!" said Poe. "I'll be back!"

All down the empty seashore black figures spindled and waned, grew up and blew into black smoke on the sky. Bells rang in mountain towers and licorice ravens spilled out with the bronze sounds and spun away to ashes.

Over a lonely moor and into a small valley Poe and Bierce hurried, and found themselves quite suddenly on a cobbled street, in cold, bleak, biting weather, with people stomping up and down stony courtyards to warm their feet; foggy withal, and candles flaring in the windows of offices and shops where hung the Yuletide turkeys. At a distance some boys, all bundled up, snorting their pale breaths on the wintry air, were trilling, "God Rest Ye Merry, Gentlemen," while the immense tones of a great clock continuously sounded midnight. Children dashed by from the baker's, dinners all asteam in their grubby fists, on trays and under silver bowls.

At a sign which read SCROOGE, MARLEY AND DICKENS Poe gave the Marley-faced knocker a rap, and from within, as the door popped open a few inches, a sudden gust of music almost swept them into a dance. And there, beyond the shoulder of the man who was sticking a trim goatee and mustaches at them, was Mr. Fezziwig clapping his hands, and Mrs. Fezziwig, one vast substantial smile, dancing and colliding with other merrymakers, while the fiddle chirped and laughter ran about a table like chandelier crystals given a sudden push of wind. The large table was heaped with brawn and turkey and holly and geese, with mince pies, suckling pigs, wreaths of sausages, oranges and apples, and there was Bob Cratchit and Little Dorrit and Tiny Tim and Mr. Fagin himself, and a man who looked as if he might be an undigested bit of beef, a blot of mustard, a crumb of cheese, a fragment of an underdone potato—who else but Mr. Marley, chains and all, while the wine poured and the brown turkeys did their excellent best to steam!

"What do you want?" demanded Mr. Charles Dickens.

"We've come to plead with you again, Charles, we need your help," said Poe.

"Help? Do you think I would help you fight against those good men coming in the rocket? I don't belong here, anyway. My books were burned by mistake. I'm no supernaturalist, no writer of horrors and terrors like you, Poe, you, Bierce, or the others. I'll have nothing to do with you terrible people!"

"You are a persuasive talker," reasoned Poe. "You could go to meet the rocket men, lull them, lull their suspicions and then—then we would take care of them."

Mr. Dickens eyed the folds of the black cape which hid Poe's hands. From it, smiling, Poe drew forth a black cat. "For *one* of our visitors?"

"And for the others?"

Poe smiled again, well pleased. "The Premature Burial?"

"You are a grim man, Mr. Poe."

"I am a frightened and an angry man. I am a god, Mr. Dickens, even as you are a god, even as we all are gods, and our inventions—our people, if you wish—have not only been threatened, but banished and burned, torn up and censored, ruined and done away with. The worlds we created are falling into ruin. Even gods must fight!"

"So?" Mr. Dickens tilted his head, impatient to return to the party, the music, the food. "Perhaps you can explain why we are here? How did we come here?"

"War begets war. Destruction begets destruction. On Earth, a century ago, in the year 2020 they outlawed our books. Oh, what a horrible thing—to destroy our literary creations that way! It summoned us out of—what? Death? The Beyond? I don't like abstract things. I don't know. I only know that our worlds and our creations called us and we tried to save them, and the only saving thing we could do was

wait out the century here on Mars, hoping Earth might overweight itself with these scientists and their doubtings, but now they're coming to clean us out of here, us and our dark things, and all the alchemists, witches, vampires, and were-things that, one by one, retreated across space as science made inroads through every country on Earth and finally left no alternative at all but exodus. You must help us. You have a good speaking manner. We need you."

"I repeat, I am not of you, I don't approve of you or the others," cried Dickens angrily. "I was no player with witches and vampires and midnight things."

"What of *A Christmas Carol*?"

"Ridiculous! *One* story. Oh, I wrote a few others about ghosts, perhaps, but what of that? My basic works had none of that nonsense!"

"Mistaken or not, they grouped you with us. They destroyed your books—your worlds too. You must hate them, Mr. Dickens!"

"I admit they are stupid and rude, but that is all. Good day!"

The door slammed. As Poe turned away, down the street, skimming over the frosty ground, the coachman playing a lively air on a bugle, came a great coach, out of which, cherry-red, laughing and singing, piled the Pickwickians, banging on the door, shouting Merry Christmas good and loud, when the door was opened by the fat boy.

Mr. Poe hurried along the midnight shore of the dry sea. By fires and smoke he hesitated, to shout orders, to check the bubbling caldrons, the poisons and the chalked pentagrams. "Good!" he said, and ran on. "Fine!" he shouted, and ran again. People joined him and ran with him. Here were Mr. Coppard and Mr. Machen running with him now. And there were hating serpents and angry demons and fiery bronze dragons and spitting vipers and trembling witches like the barbs and nettles and thorns and all the vile flotsam and jetsam of the retreating sea of imagination, left on the melancholy shore, whining and frothing and spitting.

Mr. Machen stopped. He sat like a child on the sand. He began to sob. They tried to soothe him, but he would not listen. "I just thought," he said. "What happens to us on the day when the *last* copies of our books are destroyed?"

The air whirled.

"Don't speak of it!"

"We must," wailed Mr. Machen. "Now, now, as the rocket comes down, you, Mr. Poe; you, Coppard; you, Bierce—all of you grow faint. Like wood smoke. Blowing away. Your faces melt—"

"Death! *Real* death for all of us."

"We exist only through Earth's sufferance. If a final edict tonight destroyed our last few works we'd be like lights put out."

Coppard brooded gently. "I wonder who I am. In what Earth mind tonight do I exist? In some African hut? Some hermit, reading my tales? Is he the lonely candle in the wind of time and science? The flickering orb sustaining me here in rebellious exile? Is it him? Or some boy in a discarded attic, finding me, only just in time! Oh,

last night I felt ill, ill, ill to the marrows of me, for there is a body of the soul as well as a body of the body, and this soul body ached in all of its glowing parts, and last night I felt myself a candle, guttering. When suddenly I sprang up, given new light! As some child, sneezing with dust, in some yellow garret on Earth once more found a worn, time-specked copy of me! And so I'm given a short respite!"

A door banged wide in a little hut by the shore. A thin short man, with flesh hanging from him in folds, stepped out and, paying no attention to the others, sat down and stared into his clenched fists.

"There's the one I'm sorry for," whispered Blackwood. "Look at him, dying away. He was once more real than we, who were men. They took him, a skeleton thought, and clothed him in centuries of pink flesh and snow beard and red velvet suit and black boot, made him reindeers, tinsel, holly. And after centuries of manufacturing him they drowned him in a vat of Lysol, you might say."

The men were silent.

"What must it be on Earth?" wondered Poe. "Without Christmas? No hot chestnuts, no tree, no ornaments or drums or candles—nothing, nothing but the snow and wind and the lonely, factual people...."

They all looked at the thin little old man with the scraggly beard and faded red velvet suit.

"Have you heard his story?"

"I can imagine it. The glitter-eyed psychiatrist, the clever sociologist, the resentful, froth-mouthed educationalist, the antiseptic parents—"

"A regrettable situation," said Bierce, smiling, "for the Yuletide merchants who, toward the last there, as I recall, were beginning to put up holly and sing Noel the day before Halloween. With any luck at all this year they might have started on Labor Day!"

Bierce did not continue. He fell forward with a sigh. As he lay upon the ground he had time to say only, "How interesting." And then, as they all watched, horrified, his body burned into blue dust and charred bone, the ashes of which fled through the air in black tatters.

"Bierce, Bierce!"

"Gone!"

"His last book gone. Someone on Earth just now burned it."

"God rest him. Nothing of him left now. For what are we but books, and when those are gone, nothing's to be seen."

A rushing sound filled the sky.

They cried out, terrified, and looked up. In the sky, dazzling it with sizzling fire clouds, was the rocket! Around the men on the seashore lanterns bobbed; there was a squealing and a bubbling and an odor of cooked spells. Candle-eyed pumpkins lifted into the cold clear air. Thin fingers clenched into fists and a witch screamed from her withered mouth:

"Ship, ship, break, fall!
Ship, ship, burn all!
Crack, flake, shake, melt!
Mummy dust, cat pelt!"

"Time to go," murmured Blackwood. "On to Jupiter, on to Saturn or Pluto."

"Run away?" shouted Poe in the wind. "Never!"

"I'm a tired old man!"

Poe gazed into the old man's face and believed him. He climbed atop a huge boulder and faced the ten thousand gray shadows and green lights and yellow eyes on the hissing wind.

"The powders!" he shouted.

A thick hot smell of bitter almond, civet, cumin, wormseed and orris!

The rocket came down—steadily down, with the shriek of a damned spirit! Poe raged at it! He flung his fists up and the orchestra of heat and smell and hatred answered in symphony! Like stripped tree fragments, bats flew upward! Burning hearts, flung like missiles, burst in bloody sparks on the singed air. Down, down, relentlessly down, like a pendulum the rocket came. And Poe howled, furiously, and shrank back with every sweep and sweep of the rocket cutting and ravening the air! All the dead sea seemed a pit in which, trapped, they waited the sinking of the dread machinery, the glistening ax; they were people under the avalanche!

"The snakes!" screamed Poe.

And luminous serpentines of undulant green hurtled toward the rocket. But it came down, a sweep, a fire, a motion, and it lay panting out exhaustions of red plumage on the sand, a mile away.

"At it!" shrieked Poe. "The plan's changed! Only one chance! Run! At it! At it! Drown them with our bodies! Kill them!"

And as if he had commanded a violent sea to change its course, to suck itself free from primeval beds, the whirls and savage gouts of fire spread and ran like wind and rain and stark lightning over the sea sands, down empty river deltas, shadowing and screaming, whistling and whining, sputtering and coalescing toward the rocket which, extinguished, lay like a clean metal torch in the farthest hollow. As if a great charred caldron of sparkling lava had been overturned, the boiling people and snapping animals churned down the dry fathoms.

"Kill them!" screamed Poe, running.

The rocket men leaped out of their ship, guns ready. They stalked about, sniffing the air like hounds. They saw nothing. They relaxed.

The captain stepped forth last. He gave sharp commands. Wood was gathered, kindled, and a fire leapt up in an instant. The captain beckoned his men into a half circle about him.

"A new world," he said, forcing himself to speak deliberately, though he glanced nervously, now and again, over his shoulder at the empty sea. "The old world left behind. A new start. What more symbolic than that we here dedicate ourselves all the more firmly to science and progress." He nodded crisply to his lieutenant. "The books."

Firelight limned the faded gilt titles: *The Willows*, *The Outsider*, *Behold*, *The Dreamer*, *Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde*, *The Land of Oz*, *Pellucidar*, *The Land That Time*

Forgot, A Midsummer Night's Dream, and the monstrous names of Machen and Edgar Allan Poe, and Cabell and Dunsany and Blackwood and Lewis Carroll, the names, the old names, the evil names.

"A new world. With a gesture, we burn the last of the old."

The captain ripped pages from the books. Leaf by seared leaf, he fed them into the fire.

A scream!

Leaping back, the men stared beyond the firelight at the edges of the encroaching and uninhabited sea.

Another scream! A high and wailing thing, like the death of a dragon and the thrashing of a bronzed whale left gasping when the waters of a leviathan's sea drain down the shingles and evaporate.

It was the sound of air rushing in to fill a vacuum, where, a moment before, there had been *something*!

The captain neatly disposed of the last book by putting it into the fire.

The air stopped quivering.

Silence!

The rocket men leaned and listened.

"Captain, did you hear it?"

"No."

"Like a wave, sir. On the sea bottom! I thought I saw something. Over there. A black wave. Big. Running at us."

"You were mistaken."

"There, sir!"

"What?"

"See it? There! The city! Way over! That green city near the lake! It's splitting in half. It's falling!"

The men squinted and shuffled forward.

Smith stood trembling among them. He put his hand to his head as if to find a thought there. "I remember. Yes, now I do. A long time back. When I was a child. A book I read. A story. Oz, I think it was. Yes, Oz. The Emerald City of Oz..."

"Oz? Never heard of it."

"Yes, Oz, that's what it was. I saw it just now, like in the story. I saw it fall."

"Smith!"

"Yes, sir?"

"Report for psychoanalysis tomorrow."

"Yes, sir!" A brisk salute.

Then men tiptoed, guns alert, beyond the ship's aseptic light to gaze at the long sea and the low hills.

"Why," whispered Smith, disappointed, "there's no one here at all, is there? No one here at all."

The wind blew sand over his shoes, whining.

The One Who Waits

I live in a well. I live like smoke in the well. Like vapor in a stone throat. I don't move. I don't do anything but wait. Overhead I see the cold stars of night and morning, and I see the sun. And sometimes I sing old songs of this world when it was young. How can I tell you what I am when I don't know? I cannot. I am simply waiting. I am mist and moonlight and memory. I am sad and I am old. Sometimes I fall like rain into the well. Spider webs are startled into forming where my rain falls fast, on the water surface. I wait in cool silence and there will be a day when I no longer wait.

Now it is morning. I hear a great thunder. I smell fire from a distance. I hear a metal crashing. I wait. I listen.

Voices. Far away.

"All right!"

One voice. An alien voice. An alien tongue I cannot know. No word is familiar. I listen.

"Send the men out!"

A crunching in crystal sands.

"Mars! So this is it!"

"Where's the flag?"

"Here, sir."

"Good, good."

The sun is high in the blue sky and its golden rays fill the well and I hang like a flower pollen, invisible and misting in the warm light.

Voices.

"In the name of the Government of Earth, I proclaim this to be the Martian Territory, to be equally divided among the member nations."

What are they saying? I turn in the sun, like a wheel, invisible and lazy, golden and tireless.

"What's over here?"

"A well!"

"No!"

"Come on. Yes!"

The approach of warmth. Three objects bend over the well mouth, and my coolness rises to the objects.

"Great!"

"Think it's good water?"

"We'll see."

"Someone get a lab test bottle and a dropline."

"I will!"

A sound of running. The return.

"Here we are."

I wait.

"Let it down. Easy."

Glass shines, above, coming down on a slow line.

The water ripples softly as the glass touches and fills. I rise in the warm air toward the well mouth.

"Here we are. You want to test this water, Regent?"

"Let's have it."

"What a beautiful well. Look at that construction. How old you think it is?"

"God knows. When we landed in that other town yesterday Smith said there hasn't been life on Mars in ten thousand years."

"Imagine."

"How is it, Regent? The water."

"Pure as silver. Have a glass."

The sound of water in the hot sunlight. Now I hover like a dust, a cinnamon, upon the soft wind.

"What's the matter, Jones?"

"I don't know. Got a terrible headache. All of a sudden."

"Did you drink the water yet?"

"No, I haven't. It's not that. I was just bending over the well and all of a sudden my head split. I feel better now."

Now I know who I am.

My name is Stephen Leonard Jones and I am twenty-five years old and I have just come in a rocket from a planet called Earth and I am standing with my good friends Regent and Shaw by an old well on the planet Mars.

I look down at my golden fingers, tan and strong. I look at my long legs and at my silver uniform and at my friends. "What's wrong, Jones?" they say. "Nothing," I say, looking at them. "Nothing at all."

The food is good. It has been ten thousand years since food. It touches the tongue in a fine way and the wine with the food is warming. I listen to the sound of voices. I make words that I do not understand but somehow understand. I test the air.

"What's the matter, Jones?"

I tilt this head of mine and rest my hands holding the silver utensils of eating. I feel everything.

"What do you mean?" this voice, this new thing of mine, says.

"You keep breathing funny. Coughing," says the other man.

I pronounce exactly. "Maybe a little cold coming on."

"Check with the doc later."

I nod my head and it is good to nod. It is good to do several things after ten thousand years. It is good to breathe the air and it is good to feel the sun in the flesh deep and going deeper and it is good to feel the structure of ivory, the fine skeleton hidden in the warming flesh, and it is good to hear sounds much clearer and more immediate than they were in the stone deepness of a well. I sit enchanted.

"Come out of it, Jones. Snap to it. We got to move!"

"Yes," I say, hypnotized with the way the word forms like water on the tongue and falls with slow beauty out into the air.

I walk and it is good walking. I stand high and it is a long way to the ground when I look down from my eyes and my head. It is like living on a fine cliff and being happy there.

Regent stands by the stone well, looking down. The others have gone murmuring to the silver ship from which they came.

I feel the fingers of my hand and the smile of my mouth.

"It is deep," I say.

"Yes."

"It is called a Soul Well."

Regent raises his head and looks at me. "How do you know that?"

"Doesn't it look like one?"

"I never heard of a Soul Well."

"A place where waiting things, things that once had flesh, wait and wait," I say, touching his arm.

The sand is fire and the ship is silver fire in the hotness of the day and the heat is good to feel. The sound of my feet in the hard sand. I listen. The sound of the wind and the sun burning the valleys. I smell the smell of the rocket boiling in the noon. I stand below the port.

"Where's Regent?" someone says.

"I saw him by the well," I reply.

One of them runs toward the well. I am beginning to tremble. A fine shivering tremble, hidden deep, but becoming very strong. And for the first time I hear it, as if it too were hidden in a well. A voice calling deep within me, tiny and afraid. And the voice cries, *Let me go, let me go*, and there is a feeling as if something is trying to get free, a pounding of labyrinthine doors, a rushing down dark corridors and up passages, echoing and screaming.

"Regent's in the well!"

The men are running, all five of them. I run with them but now I am sick and the trembling is violent.

"He must have fallen. Jones, you were here with him. Did you see? Jones? Well, speak up, man."

"What's wrong, Jones?"

I fall to my knees, the trembling is so bad.

"He's sick. Here, help me with him."

"The sun."

"No, not the sun," I murmur.

They stretch me out and the seizures come and go like earthquakes and the deep hidden voice in me cries, *This is Jones, this is me, that's not him, that's not him, don't believe him, let me out, let me out!* And I look up at the bent figures and my eyelids flicker. They touch my wrists.

"His heart is acting up."

I close my eyes. The screaming stops. The shivering ceases.

I rise, as in a cool well, released.

"He's dead," says someone.

"Jones is dead."

"From what?"

"Shock, it looks like."

"What kind of shock?" I say, and my name is Sessions and my lips move crisply, and I am the captain of these men. I stand among them and I am looking down at a body which lies cooling on the sands. I clap both hands to my head.

"Captain!"

"It's nothing," I say, crying out. "Just a headache. I'll be all right. There. There," I whisper. "It's all right now."

"We'd better get out of the sun, sir."

"Yes," I say, looking down at Jones. "We should never have come. Mars doesn't want us."

We carry the body back to the rocket with us, and a new voice is calling deep in me to be let out.

Help, help. Far down in the moist earthen-works of the body. *Help, help!* in red fathoms, echoing and pleading.

The trembling starts much sooner this time. The control is less steady.

"Captain, you'd better get in out of the sun, you don't look too well, sir."

"Yes," I say. "Help," I say.

"What, sir?"

"I didn't say anything."

"You said 'Help,' sir."

"Did I, Matthews, did I?"

The body is laid out in the shadow of the rocket and the voice screams in the deep underwater catacombs of bone and crimson tide. My hands jerk. My mouth splits and is parched. My nostrils fasten wide. My eyes roll. *Help, help, oh help, don't, don't, let me out, don't, don't.*

"Don't," I say.

"What, sir?"

"Never mind," I say. "I've got to get free," I say. I clap my hand to my mouth.

"How's that, sir?" cries Matthews.

"Get inside, all of you, go back to Earth!" I shout.

A gun is in my hand. I lift it.

"Don't, sir!"

An explosion. Shadows run. The screaming is cut off. There is a whistling sound of falling through space.

After ten thousand years, how good to die. How good to feel the sudden coolness, the relaxation. How good to be like a hand within a glove that stretches out and grows wonderfully cold in the hot sand. Oh, the quiet and the loveliness of gathering, darkening death. But one cannot linger on.

A crack, a snap.

"Good God, he's killed himself!" I cry, and open my eyes and there is the captain lying against the rocket, his skull split by a bullet, his eyes wide, his tongue protruding between his white teeth. Blood runs from his head. I bend to him and touch him. "The fool," I say. "Why did he do that?"

The men are horrified. They stand over the two dead men and turn their heads to see the Martian sands and the distant well where Regent lies lolling in deep waters. A croaking comes out of their dry lips, a whimpering, a childish protest against this awful dream.

The men turn to me.

After a long while, one of them says, "That makes you captain, Matthews."

"I know," I say slowly.

"Only six of us left."

"Good God, it happened so quick!"

"I don't want to stay here, let's get out!"

The men clamor. I go to them and touch them now, with a confidence which almost sings in me. "Listen," I say, and touch their elbows or their arms or their hands.

We all fall silent.

We are one.

No, no, no, no, no, no! Inner voices crying, deep down and gone into prisons beneath exteriors.

We are looking at each other. We are Samuel Matthews and Raymond Moses and William Spaulding and Charles Evans and Forrest Cole and John Summers, and we say nothing but look upon each other and our white faces and shaking hands.

We turn, as one, and look at the well.

"Now," we say.

No, no, six voices scream, hidden and layered down and stored forever.

Our feet walk in the sand and it is as if a great hand with twelve fingers were moving across the hot sea bottom.

We bend to the well, looking down. From the cool depths six faces peer back up at us.

One by one we bend until our balance is gone, and one by one drop into the mouth and down through cool darkness into the cold waters.

The sun sets. The stars wheel upon the night sky. Far out, there is a wink of light. Another rocket coming, leaving red marks on space.

I live in a well. I live like smoke in a well. Like vapor in a stone throat. Overhead I see the cold stars of night and morning, and I see the sun. And sometimes I sing old songs of this world when it was young. How can I tell you what I am when even I don't know? I cannot.

I am simply waiting.

The Disease

In the night, the Martian awoke.

"I am dying," he thought, and after a short while of terror, he became immediately calm, lying there. "My name; what is my name? I am dying and must know my name, for if I can't remember it, no one ever will. I can't remember. I am dead. Part of me is dead already. My legs. I cannot move them. My left hand, it is like wood."

He turned his head to look upon his wife where she lay. But she was already dead, he could tell, not by seeing her but by listening and hearing nothing and thus knowing she had stopped breathing or moving. When his eyes grew accustomed to the darkness he saw her there, like a small dark craft rising and falling upon the tidal mist of the room. Upon the bed of fog where they lay down each night, there was his wife, supported in each limb, but oh what a *color* she had turned!

"She is black," he thought. "She is of a blackness I have never seen. She never guessed. She never knew. She didn't even wake up. It took her so quickly. She is burned black by a fever, the eyelids have shriveled, the hands have shrunken like black wax, oh she is darker than any darkness in history."

"How has this happened," he wondered, and then he knew.

"The dream," he thought. "Yes, yes, the dream. What did she call them? The men from the sky! York. York. Nathaniel York. The odd men. The odd names. York and his companion from the sky. They are killing us now, in our beds. Very quietly they came in the night, and did not rap, but burned us in our beds with a fever and a black disease. My God, how quickly! For now my *other* hand! And my body; like a *stone*!"

"But they are dead!" he said, aloud, to the room. "Those men from the stars are dead!"

"But their disease lives on after them, their disease revenges them," he thought. "Blowing on the wind into the cities. And so the tales are true, the rumors are true, the dreams and the lies and the half-hints, all are true. The old wives tales, the children's prattle, the talk of falling stars and strange men, all are true. How many of them in their star-ships? I saw only two. But there were more. In the town, what did that little girl say? A leader and three men, only a rumor, only something told from the mouths of people in the stone asylums? No. I know the secret. Only I. I wonder if the others guessed. I wonder how many are waking now, in the towns, are screaming now, knowing that the nightmare is real. How much fun it has been for them, joking about the talk of men from the stars. It has kept many jokes going for a good many

months. But I *knew*, and I said nothing. For they would have put me in a cage and shrugged their shoulders and walked away, smiling. But now they are not smiling."

Now he was almost dead. He moved his lips to prove that he could move them; to prove that part of him, at least, was still alive. He could feel the black ink pump in his body, the fever pump and burn his face. His vision was clouding.

"And far over on the other side of our world," he thought. "The Shapers of Dreams, those people there, of another strain, another race, what of them? Did they guess? Did they know? They're the sort to fight back, do something, to trust nothing, to suspect everything. And did they fight? What did they do?

"Yes, now I remember." He closed his eyes. "The story made its way here, a very funny story. About another ship from the stars and the men from it landing among the Shapers of Dreams. And finding a small town devised of their own memories. And being buried with music and speeches and cheers. A good joke, surely. And now, too late, we are all laughing, and knowing that it is not a joke or an impossible thing. I would like to look into a thousand rooms this night and see the black, burning people there, with the black lips and the black flesh, and I would say to them, I *knew*. I knew it all along. Here and there, many of us guessed but said nothing. Many of us heard music or strange songs and did not sleep nights, and some of us did things that had to do with love and loneliness, and one of us, anyway, one of us, took a gun and went out to meet the dream and the half-tale and the lie, and we shot the dream and killed it, and now the dream is killing us, the dream creeps into every room and chokes us and colors us, and we die. But we have been dead a long time, anyway, here on this world. Ten thousand years dead, the cities empty, with only a few of us left in a few small towns; a handful, really. A hundred thousand at most. A scattering of seed in the sand, where ten thousand years ago we were mighty."

He felt his heart falter. He opened his eyes and looked at the window. Far away, he saw a few sand ships gliding toward the hills.

"Escape," he thought, wearily. "A few, yes, a few of us. Escape the black disease. Into the hills. Leave the dead towns with their black dead, their burning dead."

The white sails vanished into the distances of sand.

"In a moment," he thought, "I will be dead. What is my name? Where am I?" He let his head fall and once more he gazed at his wife. "What is *her* name? Who is *she*?" With the last motion of life he stared at her, so far away, on the little sea of mist within the night room. And at last a name came to him and he cried and called it out across the sea to her.

"Ylla!" he said. "Ylla!"

And he was dead.

Dead of Summer

It was the time of the burning in the air and the ground, the glassy yellow burning of the wheat fields and the corn meadows and the white burning of the houses and the red burning of the barns. It was the time of the sun, the Martian month of August, with the thin air broiling and the canals lowering and lowering, like a thin veil, to the bottom of the baked stone rivers, leaving the boats deposited, like brittle leafs, upon the steaming dry channel. It was the time of falling perspiration, a light rain, which might, if you watched, be turned to steam. It was the time of dust rising in a warm spice upon the air. It was the time of the closed farm door, the shaded windows, the vanished snakes and the shadows underfoot all day, never gone, like children who only ran off at sunset.

The Martian Ghosts

"I for one don't believe it," said the mother.

"Come see for yourself, then," said Eem, and ran.

Well, she waddled down to the cellar into sandy dark and moistness, along a corridor or two past some old prison cells, for their house had been founded on an ancient seaport gaol, and when she reached the end of the stone passage she threw her hands to her bosom and said "Ah!"

"Get us out of here!" cried the Ghost.

"Unlock the door!" shouted the second Ghost, paler than his mate.

The mother fled upstairs and vomited straight off.

Some sailors found the mother on the stone highway near Tith. She had walked two hours, gotten a ride, and was now almost dead. She was hysterical. "My house," she said. "Has been taken over by—Ghosts! They babble in strange tongues and they have the cells under our courtyard!"

One sailor looked at the other. "Must be the hot day?"

The other nodded and winked. "Now you just come with us," he said.

"I must get to my husband," she wailed. "He'll know what to do."

"Here we go," they said.

Back at the sandhouse, the children gathered at the cell and peeked in. "Get away you dirty little thieves!" screamed the ghost.

"What's he say?" asked Eem.

"I don't know," said Kathm.

"What's he say?" asked The Ghost.

"I don't know," said the Phantom.

"Talk in strange language, the Martian language, they do."

"Talk in ghost language," said Eem. "I wish we could understand."

"Wish I knew what they said," said the Ghost, with wild yellow hair.

The delegation from the Lathws descended the cellar stairs in grave coldness. They walked quietly and decorously down the stone corridor, nodding to each other, feeling the moulding, the iron bars, whispering and gesturing. They turned a corner and approached the cell.

"Get us out of here!" screamed the Black Ghost.

"Damn it to hell!" shouted the Red Ghost.

The delegation fled back upstairs.

"Phantoms, terrors!" They trembled in the hot sunlight.

"Ghosts, yes, evil wicked horrors!"

"They must be destroyed!"

"Destroyed!"

They clutched one another for support.

"But who will do it? You, Ylt?"

"That is not my duty. It is surely Remm's."

"Not I. We must have a trial. The mother and father must be tried as witches!"

"Did you see what happened to Kemm? He fell dead when the Ghost touched him. Turned black and died away."

In the cell, one ghost turned to the other. "Now see what you did?"

"I did? Both of us."

"You touched him. What've you got, anyway?"

"What've I got, you fool. Nothing. Just some germ, harmless to me, you, everyone on Earth. Too much for him. God he rotted fast. Oh, we're in for it now, just wait."

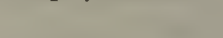
"Just the same, you shouldn't have touched him!"

The delegation dropped fire on them and after fire, acid. And after acid bullets and after bullets stone and after stones dirt and sand until the cell was buried deep and silent. Then they tore the house down, block by block and strew it to the four directions. The mother and father, screaming for mercy, denying their wickedness, were cut into a thousand pieces and buried in a thousand towns. The children were watched carefully and put in a new home, where often, late of nights they talked about the Ghosts.

"Do you suppose mother and father were witches?"

"I bet they were. How horrid to think."

When the ghosts reappeared on Mars, a year later, it was only natural that the children should be blamed, and promptly killed.



It was the night when the wind lifted sand and shook starlight down like snow, it was the night when windows rattled like crystal bones and blood ran in creek waters through the heart. All present in the house left a dent in their white pillows to lift up

their eyelids and quicken their hearing. For below in the courtyard was a mist and a whisper and a calling and the ghosts were returned to the land.

"Hello, hello," wailed the ghosts. "Hello, hello," fading off.

"Shh." And the children clenched each other with tight fists. They huddled like nuggets in bed.

"Hello, hello, hello—" The scraping tread of feet on crystalline sand. The sound of crumbling diamonds.

"Hello, hello—" Gone.

Mother hurried into the room, a blue torch in her hand. "Children, you're all right?"

"Yes!"

She held each one of them. "Your father's sick, his heart, the ghosts again, we can't take much more of this."

Through the open windows the voices came. Late at night, the voices mingled on the wind. The children lifted up from their hot pillows to turn their heads and squint their eyes and cup fingers to their ears.

"This way, this way," said a voice in the courtyard.

"Watch it," said another in the moonlight.

"So this is Mars?"

"Yes."

"Wish I was back on Earth!"

The children gripped each other, pressing back screams of fear.

It went on, night after night.

"What do the voices say?" asked Eio, the 10-year-old girl.

"They speak in a language we don't know," said Tia, the boy.

The voices spoke on ten minutes or more, then rushed away on a hot wind. A huge silver bullet vanished in the sky.

"The ghosts, the ghosts!" wailed father, and next morning he could not eat, nor work through the heat of day, but lay palsied in bed by his encounter with the phantoms.

The household was falling into bits. Everybody was in a panic. And Tia took his sister's wrists tight in his fingers and said, looking into her face, "Tonight, we'll set a trap, we'll catch the ghosts!"

"Oh, Tia," she cried. "You're brave!"

In the courtyard he worked all afternoon, his face intent.

They thought of the ghosts and trembled and paled and lay in their beds at night unable to close their pale yellow eyes, their mouths quivering, their nerves expectant. For they had heard of the ghosts again and again, from the father and the mother, the aunts and the uncles and now as the double moons of Mars arose above the blue Martian hills they crept to the window and peered out. Ytil and Crr and Wii, the three of them, expelling their breath, waiting and watching the misty sky.

Jemima True

Jemima True came to the planet Mars in the spring of the year 2160 and the men of the new town put down their feet and turned to watch her pass. For she was a lovely thing, a thistle, and they stood looking long after she drifted from sight.

It was the sixth building in the town to be hammered together and it had a flight of stairs leading up and a door at the top to be opened, and a long hall beyond the door into which you might peer at women with bodies like mother-of-pearl. You could hear their laughter all the way to the Martian canals, and you could smell their perfume which was better than the scent of home cooking to men walking in from the hot day's work of building Mars to look like Earth. There was the house, on the edge of town, where the hills came softly down to meet the artificial lights. There was always a sound of falling chandeliers in it (dropped bottles) and footsteps.

Jemima True was the young lady in room number One, with hair like an explosion of sunlight, and a skin like snow.

And so the men of Earth came in, slowly at first, and then in ever-increasing waves. Those with special interests came first of all. The microscopist, his instrument set and ready, his breath feverish, plunged out into the sere meadows of Mars to find the strange protozoon there, the paramecium and amoebae. How excited was the scientist whirling in all directions, wanting, like Tom Wolfe, to read every book, to touch everything, there was so much new material here to be devoured, to be fallen upon and scrabbled over. The types of life! My God, the types! The little dust creatures and the hill creatures and the inhabitants of the wind.

They brought in fifteen thousand lumber feet of Oregon pine and seventy-nine thousand feet of California Redwood and they hammered together a clean neat little town by the edge of the stone canals. On Sunday nights you could see red, blue and green stained glass light in the churches and hear the voices singing the numbered hymns. "We will now sing 79. We will now sing 94." And in certain houses you heard the clatter of a typewriter, the novelist at work, or the scratch of a pen, the poet at work, or no sound at all, the former beachcomber at work. It was as if, in many ways, a great earthquake had shaken loose the roots and cellars of an Iowa town, and then, in an instant, a whirlwind twister of Oz-like proportions had carried the entire town off to Mars and set it down without a bump.

With the mask in his hand, he ran through the streets. He clapped the mask to his face and cried Boo, he hid behind green elm trees, he secreted himself beneath creek

bridges, eyes shut tight, alone, to himself, secret, double-secret, for it was Halloween and the wind blew children over moon-drenched meadows of concrete and tar, and through forests of picket fence, while the great white moon clock of the court house tower solemnly mourned the hour and the stars wheeled in a mighty Ferris from one horizon to the next.

They All Had Grandfathers

It was Wednesday, May 17th, 2001 A.D. on the planet Mars.

The men were stalking across the rough grass with white twine in their big hands, followed by men with steel hammers and wedges they drove into the earth. They tied the white twine into place. All over the land the twine was humming, like a great spider web.

"Here's the post office, there's where'll be the city hall, the grocery, the jail, the dry-goods, the dime store ..." Hands swept to all horizons, pointing. Men spat and took hold of their hats in the wind.

"It's scary," whispered Samson Wood. "It's darn scary."

"What?" asked the sheriff of Nowhere Town, on Mars.

"You realize, this is the first town, the first darn town on Mars," said Samson Wood. "All that land and the string humming. Listen to it whine. Lord."

They listened to the pegged strings, the immense laid out harp playing its music.

"There's other towns, old ones built by the Martians."

"Yeah, but that's different. This is *ours*. This is us," said Samson Wood, slowly, his eyes wedged into lines, tight, watery from the early morning cold. He blew his large nose. "It ain't every day you can say you was there when they built the first town, laid the string and poured the foundations and drove the first nail. My God, it's like being in on Eden, Adam and Eve and all that."

"Yes, sir," said the Sheriff.

"Familiar, familiar," mused Samson Wood.

"How's that?"

"The frontier. Take a look. This place right here's like Wyoming, a piece of Minnesota maybe, a hunk of Iowa here and there. But most of all, it's *West*. Any moment I expect a chuck wagon to roll up and someone hit me with a biscuit, yelling, 'Gitcher chuck!' and everyone running. You know how boots sound hollow, running? I can hear 'em now."

"That's where you're from?" asked the sheriff.

"Wyoming? Heck. That and Arizona and Texas, I been around. That's why I had to come here. I never had no urge to travel, see Europe, Asia, that kind of place. But Mars is something else."

He let his eyes feed upon the land so empty and so wide. He turned in a circle by the sheriff, his eyes watering from the strain of long distances. "I came up here to find something. I don't know what. Something I never had on Earth. I don't even

know what I want or why I came, but I'm going to find it here. I'll know it when I see it."

"I guess that's why we all came."

"Me, especially. Some nights, on the trip, I got scared. I got to thinking, what if you don't find it when you get there. What if you have to go back to Earth and don't find it? That kind of thought."

"Sure."

"I had a grandfather who went West in 1890. And all my life I heard about the West, the opening out, the covered wagons, Indians, bordellos, posses, the James brothers. Grandpa told me by the fire at night, and played the guitar. Lord, I can still hear him singing."

"That was a time, all right," said the sheriff.

"Hell, it was *perfect.* A man could say, I don't like New York and go to Illinois, and when Illinois got too full he could hit the Oklahoma Territory. And on out through Texas, open spaces and then the sea. They didn't get to the sea for a long time, and then they stopped. And that was like stopping the circulation in an arm. As long as men moved around, finding new places to go, things weren't really bad. But when he got down to the last damn shore of the last land, he began to curdle. When the blood stopped moving on Earth, the wars got bigger and better, you notice. Things got too close."

"You talk sense," said the sheriff.

"I remember my Grandfather telling about a bar in a cactus town, with a crystal chandelier as big as the Milky Way and all kinds of bottles with yellow and red labels and a mirror as big as a pond frozen over in winter, he said he often wanted to skate on it when he was drunk, and red curtains and dancing girls with brassy hair and all the men with their feet on the rail and little sacks of mineral dust, and green tables with pool balls rolling on them and men chalking their cues and flicking out their cards under droplights, and a tin piano playing. God, I remember that bar, I can smell it, as if I was there. Grandpa laid it out, every grain in the wood, every butt in the brass spittoon, every straight flush and every pink garter."

"And so you came to Mars," said the sheriff.

"I did!" Samson Wood rubbed the white tines of his beard furiously. "God, the day I read the first rocket hit Mars, I laid awake all night, the window open, looking at the stars. I phoned the observatory at three a.m. to ask which in the damn hell one of those stars was Mars!"

The sheriff laughed.

Samson Wood laughed, too. "They told me, 'It's that red one above the western horizon this morning.' I looked, and there it was, by God, just like they said, and I said to myself, the shore's gone and the sea's gone and there's a new frontier. Hell, a *thousand* frontiers! Take 'em centuries to map and build that place up there in the sky, I thought. Lord, if Grandpa could only be alive now!"

"And here you are," said the sheriff.

"Packed my cardboard suitcase, silver pistols, ten gallon hat, and looked in my money-boot. In forty years I saved thirty thousand dollars. I'm sixty-five, got a bad

heart, don't look *neither*, do I? Paid $1,000 for a one-way ticket here, God help me if I don't like it here, the way I spend money might not have enough to go back on. I want to start a business of some sort. Don't know what. Something to make me feel satisfied. Been dissatisfied all my life. I'll do a bit of carpentering first, maybe. Later, when I retire, not old enough yet, have me a shanty on that prairie, buy a guitar, and sing to my *own* grandsons, oh, I'm going to marry, too, by darn, never too old. Then I can tell *my* kids about the first town and the frontier and everything *here*. Lord, sheriff, I'm the happiest man on Mars!"

"Damned if you aren't," laughed the sheriff. "Well, look! Here comes some more!"

The sheriff and Samson Wood walked down to the suddenly baked hot landing field. The great ice-blowers were pushing rivers of snowy air across the tarmac to cool it for walking. There was a tiny, magical flurry of snow.

The port of the first rocket corked open. Men in silver uniforms ran down the portable ramp, followed by slower men who got down out of the rocket with a great unease. They stood upon the soil as if it might blow away under their high boots. They tilted their ten gallon hats back and squinted at the far blue hills, and there were small lines around their sharp eyes from many years of squinting under the sun. But the sun was far away now, as small and almost as cold as a snowball in the morning sky. The air was chill.

Samson Wood dropped his suitcase. "I'll be darned! You there, Bob Coe!"

One of the men, in a neat tight pair of copper-riveted denims, stopped making a cigarette and stood with the Bull Durham tag in his mouth, the tobacco sack hanging free. He opened his mouth and let the tobacco fly, paper and all, over his shoulder. "Samson Wood, is that *you*!"

They both rushed at each other, and did a kind of shuffling, pummeling dance, shoving at each other, turning each other around.

"My gosh, Samson, what're you doing here!"

"What about you?"

"Sounded like my kind of territory."

"Mine, too!"

"You seen Shorty Hicks?"

"Is he here?"

"Sure! And more! Looky!"

And down the ramp on their clumping heels came two other men with baked clay faces and bright blue eyes, their bodies lean as beef jerky.

"Samson Wood!" they cried.

Everybody pounded everyone else on the back, laughing, hooting, and stomping. And Samson Wood pointed his pistol up and fired it six times, making everyone on the field jump.

"Yahoo!" said everybody.

An hour later they were sitting in the field of humming strings, eating ham sandwiches, their cheeks full, drinking from a communal bottle, watching each other merrily.

"Lord, Samson, let me *look* at you!"

"Look!"

They held their knees and rocked back and forth, choking on their food.

"Whyn't you *say* you was coming?"

"Just made up my mind."

"Me, too."

"Got on the blamed rocket by myself," explained Bob Coe, squinting. "Way back in a far seat who do I find but Rusty Anderson here. Upstairs, on another deck, I find Elmer Driscoe here. And at the bar, where I knew he'd be, Punk Smith there! And none of 'em knew the other was aboard! Boy!"

"Boy!" everyone agreed.

"Think there's more cowpokes coming?" Samson felt his heart racing in him, painfully. He leaned forward, excitedly.

"Hunderds!"

"Why'd you come up?"

"Why'd *you*?"

"Well, my grandfather..."

"Mine, too..."

"That makes it unanimous. *Our* grandfathers..."

"The Frontier!"

They all roared.

"I got a gittar with me."

"Me, too."

"I can play *mine*."

"That's *one* of us ain't fakin'!"

They rocked and shook.

They quieted. Samson Wood looked off at the singing bits of twine near them. He pulled one and listened to it shiver. He looked at the men near him and the sky and he felt of the money in the secret belt around his lean middle. He touched the money with a trembling hand and his face began to get redder and his eyes brighter and he let the others talk on and on.

"Gonna raise me seven hundred head of cattle, they'll need cattle here."

"Sheep for me."

"What about you, Samson?"

Samson had been deep quiet, far down inside his own personal well, moving around, pointing a lit match here and there to see his way. Now he drew himself slowly back up into their company. "I been thinking," he said.

"What?"

The men leaned in at him as if to hear a wonderful tale, with the earnest, whispering interest of children.

"I came up here looking for something. I didn't know what," said Samson Wood. "I was afraid I wouldn't find it. But now I got it in my head and I know what I came to do."

The others waited for him to say.

Samson Wood said, "I know, now, there's more of our kind coming. Grandfathers' grandsons, every one of them! And it'd only be right and happy if they found a certain business set up and going full steam when they touch land. Listen: if you fellows help me build it, nails, hammers, saws, wood and all, I'll cut you in on profits. When it's built, you can buy your ranches and still get money from me to buy livestock, feed, seed, and oil, how's it sound?"

"What's the deal?"

"Well," said Samson. Leaning forward, he whispered and smiled, gently.

"I wish you'd think it over, sir," said Samson Wood.

The mayor of Empty City, Nonesuch City, First City, Nowhere Town (the men called it everything), leaned back in his tent chair. "The restrictions," he said.

"Can't they be changed, sir?"

"I don't know. Women, you say?"

"A round dozen is all, Mr. Mayor. Ain't been a woman here yet, sir. Men been up here four months now, most of them. It stands to reason..."

"Mr. Wood, you know yourself that no one comes to Mars as a tourist. You came as a laborer, too, right? There you are."

"Couldn't you classify these women as 'laborers', your honor?"

The Mayor almost cried with laughter. "You win! But what'll I tell the wives on Earth?"

"They're sixty million miles away, and anyway, half these men aren't married. That was in their contract."

"All right, all right," shouted the Mayor. "I'll put through an order for a dozen 'laborers' tomorrow!"

"Thank you, sir." They shook hands.

There was a thunderous din of hammering and rushing and barked shins and mashed thumbs, and the town was up, toadstool-quick, a growth following a spring rain. Everything smelled immensely new and fresh. Everything looked amazingly clean and square and right.

"Hand me the hammer and nails, Bob."

Bob Coe stood at the bottom of the ladder reaching up to Mr. Samson Wood there against the sky.

"All right, now give me the sign."

There was a sound of slow hard hammering. Mr. Samson Wood descended and the five men stood with steins of beer in their hands. They lifted and drank them, their eyes upon that sign which tilted and dipped slowly in the yellow sunlight:

THE MILLED BUCK SALOON
S. Wood, Proprietor.
Dancing Girls, Entertainment
Good Food & Liquor.

Just then a rocket flashed over, bringing in the carload of "laborers."

"It's a real place, Samson," said the sheriff.

They sat on the high balcony, looking down at the smoke-wreathed bar. Along the shining bar, hip to hip, right feet clinking the brass rail, stood the men with the hard faces loosening up, their cool images drinking back at them from the crystal mirrors, their sweaty backs splashed with jewel reflections from the great tinkling-ice chandelier. In the corner, a beer foaming on the upright lid, a man in a green eyeshade hit the yellow piano keys with gnarled hands. At four tables, cards spun out, shuttling in pips and faces, chairs scraped, voices rose and fell, and behind the red velvet stage curtain, blue enamel eyes winked out, the girls, ready to explode on-stage in flurries of ripe chalky curves and pink motions at the first rip of the drum.

"All Texas is here," said the sheriff. "I feel like a character in a second class film, the kind I stomped at when I was a boy."

"All Texas, Oklahoma, Wyoming and Colorado's here," said Samson Wood. "I don't know what the other towns are going to be like, some like the Bronx, some Bavarian, Swedish, some like London, I guess. Takes time. We came first. It's always the working men come first, the runaways and hard men."

"A bunch of hardboiled romanticists," observed the sheriff. "Figure *that* one out. Men who always wanted to play cowboy, finally getting their chance. You done a great thing here, Samson, satisfied a great need. Jesus, it's perfect as a jewel; right out of the nineteenth century, that bar!"

"Got two dozen new blue velvet dresses coming in next week," said Samson, smoking a long thin cigar gently, preening his little white goatee, adjusting the dove gray lapel of his faultlessly vested suit. His gray ten-gallon lay on the table and his silver locks were combed magnificently behind his pink ears. "Bought more chandeliers, too! Prettier than that one. Got a dozen more girls coming for the upstairs room. I'm floating in money, sheriff, and I feel like a darn ham actor, but it's good, oh Lord, yes, it's the thing I wanted. I won't give it up. Who else in the world ever got a chance to relive history? Here it is! Already, it's beginning, lynchings, cattle-rustling, *everything*! Lord, you feel like a *man*!"

"The women and churches'll be here soon."

"Let 'em come! We've had a couple hours, anyway." Samson Wood expanded mellowly. "Got a cellar full of 1876 wines and liquors. Got an adobe ranch building out beyond town, a herd of cattle started, a chuck-wagon built, my old friends working with me, even learned to play the guitar, you should here me sing "Git Along Little Dogie". Sheriff, they took all the romance away from us. I grew up in an age when you couldn't ride the rods of a freight train because they took away the rods and you couldn't hitch-hike the highways because every state passed laws against it. There was nothing for a man to do who just wanted to run away. It's in every man,

early or late, some time he just wants to travel light. I waited to run away a long time, so did these others. And now we've *done* it. Look at them down there. Look at my great big swell place!"

The sheriff peered into the roiling din and hell-fire.

When he turned back, Samson Wood was dead.

On a thick square piece of cedar wood that had scrupulously flourished his name and a message, and they stood, the men with the big hats in their hands and high shoes in the soft earth while the women with their chalky faces and mascara-starry eyes listened to the sheriff speak a few words:

"Samson Wood always wanted to find the old West. He found it. He wanted to be in on something new and different. Well, he did that in more than one way. He'll be remembered as long as there are people here because he did something today nobody else did."

The sheriff nodded to the tombstone:

SAMSON WOOD
Born 1935—Died 2000
He Wanted to Be First.
First Civilian to Die on Mars.
First Buried, First Mourned
R.I.P.

On their way out of the new graveyard, a rocket flew down at them in terrible fire. They wondered if it was full of wives and priests.

The Strawberry Window

In his dream he was shutting the front door with its strawberry windows and lemon windows and windows like white clouds and windows like clear water in a country stream. Two dozen panes squared round the one big pane, colored of fruit wines and gelatins and cool water ices. He remembered his father holding him up as a child. "Look!" And through the green glass the world was emerald, moss, and summer mint. "Look!" The lilac pane made Concord grapes of all the passers by. And at last the strawberry glass perpetually bathed the town in roseate warmth, carpeted the world in pink sunrise, and made the cut lawn seem imported from some Persian rug bazaar. The strawberry window, best of all, cured people of their paleness, warmed the cold rain, and set the blowing, shifting February snows afire.

"Ah!"

He awoke.

He heard his boys talking before he was fully out of his dream and he lay in the dark now, listening to the sad sound their talk made, like the wind blowing the white sea-bottoms in the blue hills; and then he remembered.

We're on Mars, he thought.

"What?" His wife cried out in her sleep.

He hadn't realized he had spoken; he lay as still as he possibly could. But now, with a strange kind of numb reality he saw his wife rise to haunt the room, her pale face staring through the small high windows of their quonset hut at the clear but unfamiliar stars.

"Carrie," he whispered.

She did not hear.

"Carrie," he whispered. "There's something I want to tell you. For a month now I've been wanting to say...tomorrow...tomorrow morning, there's going to be..."

But his wife sat all to herself in the blue starlight and would not look at him.

He closed his eyes tight.

If only the sun stayed up, he thought, if only there was no night. For during the day, he nailed the settlement town together, the boys were in school, and Carrie had cleaning, gardening, cooking to do. But when the sun was gone and their hands were empty of flowers or hammers and nails and arithmetics, their memories, like night birds, came home in the dark. You heard them rustle the black roof like the first rain of a new season of endless rains. You woke to the cool pattering, which was not rain,

but only the slow dipping down, the flickering, brushing, touching, the whispered flight and glide of remembering towards dawn.

His wife moved, a slight turn of her head.

"Will," she said at last, "I want to go home."

"Carrie!"

"This isn't home," she said.

He saw that her eyes were wet and brimming. "Carrie, hold on awhile."

"I've got no fingernails from holding on now!"

As if she still moved in her sleep, she opened her bureau drawers and took out layers of handkerchiefs, shirts, underclothing and put it all on top of the bureau, not seeing it, letting her fingers touch and bring it out and put it down. The routine was long familiar now. She would talk and put things out and stand quietly awhile, and then later put all the things away and come, dry-faced, back to bed and dreams. He was afraid that some night she would empty every drawer, and reach for the few ancient suitcases against the wall.

"Will..." Her voice was not bitter, but soft, featureless, and as uncolored as the moonlight that showed what she was doing. "So many nights for six months I've talked this way; I'm ashamed. You work hard building houses in town. A man who works so hard shouldn't have to listen to a wife gone sad on him. But there's nothing to do but talk it out. It's the little things I miss most of all. I don't know—silly things. Our front porch swing. The wicker rocking chair, summer nights. Looking at the people walk or ride by those evenings, back in Ohio. Our black upright piano, out of tune. My Swedish cutglass. Our parlor furniture—oh, it was like a herd of elephants, I know, and all of it old. And the Chinese hanging crystals that hit when the wind blew. And talking to neighbors there on the front porch, July nights. All those crazy, silly things...they're not important. But it seems those are things that come to mind around three in the morning. I'm sorry."

"Don't be," he said. "Mars is a far place. It smells funny, looks funny, and feels funny. I think to myself nights, too. We came from a nice town."

"It was green," she said. "In the spring and summer. And yellow and red in the fall. And ours was a nice house; my, it was old, eighty-ninety years or so. Used to hear the house talking at night, whispering away. All the dry wood, the banisters, the front porch, the sills. Wherever you touched, it talked to you. Every room a different way. And when you had the whole house talking, it was a family around you in the dark, putting you to sleep. No other house, the kind they build nowadays, can be the same. A lot of people have got to go through and live in a house to make it mellow down all over. This place here, now, this hut, it doesn't know I'm in it, doesn't care if I live or die. It makes a noise like tin, and tin's cold. It's got no pores for the years to sink in. It's got no cellar for you to put things away for next year and the year after that. It's got no attic where you keep things from last year and all the other years before you were born; and without an attic, you've got no past. If we only had a little bit up here that was familiar, Will, then we could make room for all that's strange. But when everything, *every single thing* is strange, then it takes forever to make things familiar."

He nodded in the dark. "There's nothing you say that I haven't thought."

She was looking at the moonlight where it lay upon the suitcases against the wall. He saw her move her hand down towards them.

"Carrie!"

"What?"

He swung his legs out of bed. "Carrie, I've done a crazy damfool thing. All these months I heard you dreaming away, scared, and the boys at night and the wind, and Mars out there, the sea-bottoms and all, and..." He stopped and swallowed. "You got to understand what I did and why I did it. All the money we had in the bank a month ago, all the money we saved for ten years, I spent."

"Will!"

"I threw it away, Carrie, I swear, I threw it away on nothing. It was going to be a surprise. But now, tonight, there you are, and there are those damned suitcases on the floor and..."

"Will," she said, turning around. "You mean we've gone through all this, on Mars, putting away extra money every week, only to have you burn it up in a few hours?"

"I don't know," he said. "I'm a crazy fool. Look, it's not long till morning. Well get up early. I'll take you down to see what I've done. I don't want to tell you, I want you to see. And if it's no go, then, well, there's always those suitcases and the rocket to Earth four times a week."

She did not move. "Will, Will," she murmured.

"Don't say any more," he said.

"Will, Will..." She shook her head slowly, unbelievingly. He turned away and lay back down on his own side of the bed, and she sat on the other side, and for a moment did not lie down, but only sat looking at the bureau where her handkerchiefs and jewelry and clothing lay ready in neat stacks where she had left them. Outside a wind the color of moonlight stirred up the sleeping dust and powdered the air.

At last she lay back, but said nothing more and was a cold weight in the bed, staring down the long tunnel of night towards the faintest sign of morning.

They got up in the very first light and moved in the small quonset hut without a sound. It was a pantomime prolonged almost to the time when someone might scream at the silence, as the mother and father and the boys washed and dressed and ate a quiet breakfast of toast and fruit-juice and coffee, with no one looking directly at anyone and everyone watching someone in the reflective surfaces of toaster, glassware, or cutlery, where all their faces were melted out of shape and made terribly alien in the early hour. Then, at last, they opened the quonset door and let in the air that blew across the cold blue-white Martian seas, where only the sand tides dissolved and shifted and made ghost patterns, and they stepped out under a raw and staring cold sky and began their walk towards a town, which seemed no more than a motion-picture set far on ahead of them on a vast, empty stage.

"What part of town are we going to?" asked Carrie.

"The rocket depot," he said. "But before we get there, I've a lot to say."

The boys slowed down and moved behind their parents, listening. The father gazed ahead, and not once in all the time he was talking did he look at his wife or sons to see how they were taking all that he said.

"I believe in Mars," he began, quietly. "I guess I believe some day it'll belong to us. We'll nail it down. We'll settle in. We won't turn tail and run. It came to me one day a year ago, right after we first arrived. Why did we come? I asked myself. Because, I said, because. It's the same thing with the salmon every year. The salmon don't know why they go where they go, but they go, anyway. Up rivers they don't remember, up streams, jumping waterfalls, but finally making it to where they propagate and die, and the whole thing starts again. Call it racial memory, instinct, call it nothing, but there it is. And here we are."

They walked in the silent morning with the great sky watching them and the strange blue and steam-white sands sifting about their feet on the new highway.

"So here we are. And from Mars where? Jupiter, Neptune, Pluto and on out? Right. *And on out.* Why? Some day the sun will blow up like a leaky furnace. Boom—there goes Earth. But maybe Mars won't be hurt; or if Mars is hurt maybe Pluto won't be, or if Pluto's hurt, then where'll *we* be, our sons' sons, that is?"

He gazed steadily up into that flawless shell of plum-colored sky.

"Why, we'll be on some world with a number maybe; planet 6 of star system 97, planet 2 of system 99! So damn far off from here you need a nightmare to take it in! We'll be gone, do you see, gone off away and safe! And I thought to myself, ah, ah. So *that's* the reason we came to Mars, so *that's* the reason men shoot off their rockets."

"Will—"

"Let me finish. Not to make money, no. Not to see the sights, no. Those are the lies men tell, the fancy reasons they give themselves. Get rich, get famous, they say. Have fun, jump around, they say. But all the while, inside, something else is ticking along the way it ticks in salmon or whales, the way it ticks, by God, in the smallest microbe you want to name. And that little clock that ticks in everything living, you know what it says? It says get away, spread out, move along, keep swimming. Run to so many worlds and build so many towns that *nothing* can ever kill man. You *see*, Carrie? It's not just us come to Mars, it's the race, the whole darn human race, depending on how *we* make out in our lifetime. This thing is so big I want to laugh, I'm so scared stiff of it."

He felt the boys walking steadily behind him and he felt Carrie beside him and he wanted to see her face and how she was taking all this, but he didn't look there, either.

"All this is no different than me and Dad walking the fields when I was a boy, casting seed by hand when our seeder broke down and we'd no money to fix it. It had to be done somehow, for the later crops. My God, Carrie, my God, you *remember* those Sunday-supplement articles, THE EARTH WILL FREEZE IN A MILLION YEARS! I bawled once, as a boy, reading articles like that. My mother asked why. I'm bawling for all those poor people up ahead, I said. Don't worry about them, mother said. But, Carrie, that's my whole point; we *are* worrying about them. Or we wouldn't be here. It matters if Man with a capital *M* keeps going. There's

nothing better than Man with a capital *M* in my books. I'm prejudiced, of course, because I'm one of the breed. But if there's any way to get hold of that immortality men are always talking about, this is the way—spread out—seed the universe. Then you got a harvest against crop failures anywhere down the line. No matter if Earth has famines or the rust comes in. You got the new wheat lifting on Pluto or where-in-hell-ever man gets to in the next thousand years, I'm crazy with the idea, Carrie, crazy. When I finally hit on it I got so excited I wanted to grab people, you, the boys, and tell them. But hell, I knew that wasn't necessary. I knew a day or night would come when you'd hear that ticking in yourselves, too, and then you'd see, and no one'd have to say anything again about all this. It's big talk, Carrie, I know, and big thoughts for a man just short of five feet five, but by all that's holy, it's true."

They moved through the deserted streets of the town and listened to the echoes of their walking feet.

"And this morning?" said Carrie.

"I'm coming to this morning," he said. "Part of *me* wants to go home, too. But the other part says if we go, everything's lost. So I thought, what bothers us most? Some of the things we once had. Some of the boys' things, your things, mine. And I thought, if it takes an old thing to get a new thing started, by God, I'll use the old thing. I remember from history books that a thousand years ago they put charcoals in a hollowed out cow-horn, blew on them during the day, so they carried their fire on marches from place to place, to start a fire every night from the sparks left over from morning. Always a new fire, but always something of the old in it. So I weighed and balanced it off. Is the Old worth all our money? I asked. No! It's only the things we *did* with the Old that have any worth. Well, then, is the New worth *all* our money? I asked. Do you feel like investing in the day after the middle of next week? Yes! I said. If I can fight this thing that makes us want to go back to Earth, I'd dip my money in kerosene and strike a match!"

Carrie and the two boys did not move. They stood on the street, looking at him as if he were a storm that had passed over and around, almost blowing them from the ground, a storm that was now dying away.

"The freight rocket came in this morning," he said, quietly. "Our delivery's on it. Let's go and pick it up."

They walked slowly up the three steps into the rocket depot and across the echoing floor towards the freight room that was just sliding back its doors, opening for the day.

"Tell us again about the salmon," said one of the boys.

In the middle of the warm morning they drove out of town in a rented truck filled with great crates and boxes and parcels and packages, long ones, tall ones, short ones, flat ones, all numbered and neatly addressed to one William Prentiss, New Toledo, Mars.

"Will," said Carrie, over and over again. "Will."

They stopped the truck by the quonset hut and the boys jumped down and helped their mother out. For a moment Will sat behind the wheel, and then slowly got out himself, to walk around and look into the back of the truck at the crates.

And by noon all but one of the boxes were opened and their contents placed on the sea-bottom where the family stood among them.

"Carrie..."

And he led her up the old porch steps that now stood uncrated on the edge of town.

"Listen to 'em, Carrie."

The steps squeaked and whispered underfoot.

"What do they say, tell me what they say?"

She stood on the ancient wooden steps, holding to herself, and could not tell him.

He waved his hand. "Front porch here, living-room there, dining-room, kitchen, three bedrooms. Part we'll build new, part we'll bring. Of course all we got here now is the front porch, some parlor furniture and the old bed."

"All that money, Will!"

He turned, smiling. "You're not mad, now, look at me! You're not mad. We'll bring it all up, next month, next year. The cutglass vases, that Armenian carpet your mother gave us in 1961! Just *let* the sun explode!"

They looked at the other crates, numbered and lettered: Front-porch swing, front-porch wicker rocker, hanging Chinese crystals...

"I'll blow them myself to make them ring."

They set the front door on the top of the stairs, with its little panes of colored glass, and Carrie looked through the strawberry window.

"What do you see?"

But he knew what she saw, for he gazed through the colored glass, too. And there was Mars, with its cold sky warmed and its dead seas fired with color, with its hills like mounds of strawberry ice, and its sand like burning charcoals sifted by wind. The strawberry window, the strawberry window, breathed soft rose colors on the land and filled the mind and the eye with the light of a never-ending dawn. Bent there, looking through, he heard himself say:

"The town'll be out this way in a year. This'll be a shade street, you'll have your porch, and you'll have friends. You won't need all this much, then. But starting right here, with this little bit that's familiar, watch it spread, watch Mars change so you'll know it as if you'd known it all your life."

He ran down the steps to the last and as-yet unopened canvas-covered crate. With his pocket knife he cut a hole in the canvas. "Guess!" he said.

"My kitchen stove? My furnace?"

"Not in a million years." He smiled very gently. "Sing me a song," he said.

"Will, you're clean off your head."

"Sing me a song worth all the money we had in the bank and now don't have, but who gives a blast in hell," he said.

"I don't know anything but 'Genevieve, Sweet Genevieve!'"

"Sing that," he said.

But she could not open her mouth and start the song. He saw her lips move and try, but there was no sound.

He ripped the canvas wider and shoved his hand into the crate and touched around for a quiet moment, and started to sing the words himself until he moved his hand a last time and then a single clear piano chord sprang out on the morning air.

"There," he said. "Let's take it right on to the end, Everyone! Here's the harmony."

WAY IN THE MIDDLE OF THE AIR

"Did you hear about it?"

"About what?"

"The niggers, the niggers!"

"What about 'em?"

"Them leaving, pulling out, going away; did you hear?"

"What you mean, pulling out? How can they do that?"

"They can, they will, they are."

"Just a couple?"

"Every single one here in the South!"

"No."

"Yes!"

"I got to see that. I don't believe it. Where they going—Africa?"

A silence.

"Mars."

"You mean the *planet* Mars?"

"That's right."

The men stood up in the hot shade of the hardware porch. Someone quit lighting a pipe. Somebody else spat out into the hot dust of noon.

"They can't leave, they can't do that."

"They're doing it, anyways."

"Where'd you hear this?"

"It's everywhere, on the radio a minute ago, just come through."

Like a series of dusty statues, the men came to life.

Samuel Teece, the hardware proprietor, laughed uneasily. "I *wondered* what happened to Silly. I sent him on my bike an hour ago. He ain't come back from Mrs. Bordman's yet. You think that black fool just pedaled off to Mars?"

The men snorted.

"All I say is, he better bring back my bike. I don't take stealing from no one, by God."

"Listen!"

The men collided irritably with each other, turning.

Far up the street the levee seemed to have broken. The black warm waters descended and engulfed the town. Between the blazing white banks of the town stores, among the tree silences, a black tide flowed. Like a kind of summer molasses, it poured turgidly forth upon the cinnamon-dusty road. It surged slow, slow, and it

was men and women and horses and barking dogs, and it was little boys and girls. And from the mouths of the people partaking of this tide came the sound of a river. A summer-day river going somewhere, murmuring and irrevocable. And in that slow, steady channel of darkness that cut across the white glare of day were touches of alert white, the eyes, the ivory eyes staring ahead, glancing aside, as the river, the long and endless river, took itself from old channels into a new one. From various and uncountable tributaries, in creeks and brooks of color and motion, the parts of this river had joined, become one mother current, and flowed on. And brimming the swell were things carried by the river: grandfather clocks chiming, kitchen clocks ticking, caged hens screaming, babies wailing; and swimming among the thickened eddies were mules and cats, and sudden excursions of burst mattress springs floating by, insane hair stuffing sticking out, and boxes and crates and pictures of dark grandfathers in oak frames—the river flowing it on while the men sat like nervous hounds on the hardware porch, too late to mend the levee, their hands empty.

Samuel Teece wouldn't believe it. "Why, hell, where'd they get the transportation? How they goin' to get to Mars?"

"Rockets," said Grandpa Quartermain.

"All the damn-fool things. Where'd they get rockets?"

"Saved their money and built them."

"I never heard about it."

"Seems these niggers kept it secret, worked on the rockets all themselves, don't know where—in Africa, maybe."

"Could they *do* that?" demanded Samuel Teece, pacing about the porch. "Ain't there a law?"

"It ain't as if they're declarin' war," said Grandpa quietly.

"Where do they get off, God damn it, workin' in secret, plottin'?" shouted Teece.

"Schedule is for all this town's niggers to gather out by Loon Lake. Rockets be there at one o'clock, pick 'em up, take 'em to Mars."

"Telephone the governor, call out the militia," cried Teece. "They should've given notice!"

"Here comes your woman, Teece."

The men turned again.

As they watched, down the hot road in the windless light first one white woman and then another arrived, all of them with stunned faces, all of them rustling like ancient papers. Some of them were crying, some were stern. All came to find their husbands. They pushed through barroom swing doors, vanishing. They entered cool, quiet groceries. They went in at drug shops and garages. And one of them, Mrs. Clara Teece, came to stand in the dust by the hardware porch, blinking up at her stiff and angry husband as the black river flowed full behind her.

"It's Lucinda, Pa; you got to come home!"

"I'm not comin' home for no damn darkie!"

"She's leaving. What'll I do without her?"

"Fetch for yourself, maybe. I won't get down on my knees to stop her."

"But she's like a family member," Mrs. Teece moaned.

"Don't shout! I won't have you blubberin' in public this way about no goddamn—"

His wife's small sob stopped him. She dabbed at her eyes. "I kept telling her, 'Lucinda,' I said, 'you stay on and I raise your pay, and you get two nights off a week, if you want,' but she just looked set! I never seen her so set, and I said, 'Don't you *love* me, Lucinda?' and she said yes, but she had to go because that's the way it was, is all. She cleaned the house and dusted it and put luncheon on the table and then she went to the parlor door and—and stood there with two bundles, one by each foot, and shook my hand and said, 'Good-by, Mrs. Teece.' And she went out the door. And there was her luncheon on the table, and all of us too upset to even eat it. It's still there now, I know; last time I looked it was getting cold."

Teece almost struck her. "God damn it, Mrs. Teece, you get the hell home. Standin' there makin' a sight of yourself!"

"But, Pa..."

He strode away into the hot dimness of the store. He came back out a few seconds later with a silver pistol in his hand.

His wife was gone.

The river flowed black between the buildings, with a rustle and a creak and a constant whispering shuffle. It was a very quiet thing, with a great certainty to it; no laughter, no wildness, just a steady, decided, and ceaseless flow.

Teece sat on the edge of his hardwood chair. "If one of 'em so much as laughs, by Christ, I'll kill 'em."

The men waited.

The river passed quietly in the dreamful noon.

"Looks like you goin' to have to hoe your own turnips, Sam," Grandpa chuckled.

"I'm not bad at shootin' white folks neither." Teece didn't look at Grandpa. Grandpa turned his head away and shut up his mouth.

"Hold on there!" Samuel Teece leaped off the porch. He reached up and seized the reins of a horse ridden by a tall Negro man. "You, Belter, come down off there!"

"Yes, sir." Belter slid down.

Teece looked him over. "Now, just what you think you're doin'?"

"Well, Mr. Teece..."

"I reckon you think you're goin', just like that song—what's the words? 'Way up in the middle of the air'; ain't *that* it?"

"Yes, sir." The Negro waited.

"You recollect you owe me fifty dollars, Belter?"

"Yes, sir."

"You tryin' to sneak out? By God, I'll horsewhip you!"

"All the excitement, and it slipped my mind, sir."

"It slipped his mind." Teece gave a vicious wink at his men on the hardware porch. "God damn, mister, you know what you're goin' to do?"

"No, sir."

"You're stayin' here to work out that fifty bucks, or my name ain't Samuel W. Teece." He turned again to smile confidently at the men in the shade.

Belter looked at the river going along the street, that dark river flowing and flowing between the shops, the dark river on wheels and horses and in dusty shoes, the dark river from which he had been snatched on his journey. He began to shiver. "Let me go, Mr. Teece. I'll send your money from up there, I promise!"

"Listen, Belter." Teece grasped the man's suspenders like two harp strings, playing them now and again, contemptuously, snorting at the sky, pointing one bony finger straight at God. "Belter, you know anything about what's up there?"

"What they tells me."

"What they tells him! Christ! Hear that? What they tells him!" He swung the man's weight by his suspenders, idly, ever so casual, flicking a finger in the black face. "Belter, you fly up and up like a July Fourth rocket, and bang! There you are, cinders, spread all over space. Them crackpot scientists, they don't know nothin', they kill you all off!"

"I don't care."

"Glad to hear that. Because you know what's up on that planet Mars? There's monsters with big raw eyes like mushrooms! You seen them pictures on those future magazines you buy at the drugstore for a dime, ain't you? Well! Them monsters jump up and suck marrow from your bones!"

"I don't care, don't care at all, don't care." Belter watched the parade slide by, leaving him. Sweat lay on his dark brow. He seemed about to collapse.

"And it's cold up there; no air, you fall down, jerk like a fish, gaspin', dyin', stranglin', stranglin' and dyin'. You *like* that?"

"Lots of things I don't like, sir. Please, sir, let me go. I'm late."

"I'll let you go when I'm ready to let you go. We'll just talk here polite until I say you can leave, and you know it damn well. You want to travel, do you? Well, Mister Way up in the Middle of the Air, you get the hell home and work out that fifty bucks you owe me! Take you two months to do that!"

"But if I work it out, I'll miss the rocket, sir!"

"Ain't that a shame now?" Teece tried to look sad.

"I give you my horse, sir."

"Horse ain't legal tender. You don't move until I get my money." Teece laughed inside. He felt very warm and good.

A small crowd of dark people had gathered to hear all this. Now as Belter stood, head down, trembling, an old man stepped forward.

"Mister?"

Teece flashed him a quick look. "Well?"

"How much this man owe you, mister?"

"None of your damn business!"

The old man looked at Belter. "How much, son?"

"Fifty dollars."

The old man put out his black hands at the people around him. "There's twenty-five of you. Each give two dollars; quick now, this no time for argument."

"Here, now!" cried Teece, stiffening up, tall, tall.

The money appeared. The old man fingered it into his hat and gave the hat to Belter. "Son," he said, "you ain't missin' no rocket."

Belter smiled into the hat. "No, sir, I guess I ain't!"

Teece shouted: "You give that money back to them!"

Belter bowed respectfully, handing the money over, and when Teece would not touch it he set it down in the dust at Teece's feet. "There's your money, sir," he said. "Thank you kindly."

Smiling, he gained the saddle of his horse and whipped his horse along, thanking the old man, who rode with him now until they were out of sight and hearing.

"Son of a bitch," whispered Teece, staring blind at the sun. "Son of a bitch."

"Pick up the money, Samuel," said someone from the porch.

It was happening all along the way. Little white boys, barefoot, dashed up with the news. "Them that has helps them that hasn't! And that way they *all* get free! Seen a rich man give a poor man two hundred bucks to pay off some'un! Seen some'un else give some'un else ten bucks, five bucks, sixteen, lots of that, all over, everybody!"

The white men sat with sour water in their mouths. Their eyes were almost puffed shut, as if they had been struck in their faces by wind and sand and heat.

The rage was in Samuel Teece. He climbed up on the porch and glared at the passing swarms. He waved his gun. And after a while when he had to do something, he began to shout at anyone, any Negro who looked up at him. "Bang! There's another rocket out in space!" he shouted so all could hear. "Bang! By God!" The dark heads didn't flicker or pretend to hear, but their white eyes slid swiftly over and back. "Crash! All them rockets fallin'! Screamin', dyin'! Bang! God Almighty, I'm glad *I'm* right here on old terra firma. As they says in that old joke, the more firma, the less terra! Ha, ha!"

Horses clopped along, shuffling up dust. Wagons bumbled on ruined springs.

"Bang!" His voice was lonely in the heat, trying to terrify the dust and the blazing sun sky. "Wham! Niggers all over space! Jerked outa rockets like so many minnows hit by a meteor, by God! Space fulla meteors. You know that? Sure! Thick as buckshot; powie! Shoot down them tin-can rockets like so many ducks, so many clay pipes! Ole sardine cans full of black cod! Bangin' like a stringa ladyfingers, bang, bang, bang! Ten thousand dead here, ten thousand there. Floatin' in space, around and around earth, ever and ever, cold and way out, Lord! You hear that, *you* there!"

Silence. The river was broad and continuous. Having entered all cotton shacks during the hour, having flooded all the valuables out, it was now carrying the clocks and the washboards, the silk bolts and curtain rods on down to some distant black sea.

High tide passed. It was two o'clock. Low tide came. Soon the river was dried up, the town silent, the dust settling in a film on the stores, the seated men, the tall hot trees.

Silence.

The men on the porch listened.

Hearing nothing, they extended their thoughts and their imaginations out and out into the surrounding meadows. In the early morning the land had been filled with its usual concoctions of sound. Here and there, with stubborn persistence to custom, there had been voices singing, the honey laughter under the mimosa branches, the

pickaninnies rushing in clear water laughter at the creek, movements and bendings in the fields, jokes and shouts of amusement from the shingle shacks covered with fresh green vine.

Now it was as if a great wind had washed the land clean of sounds. There was nothing. Skeleton doors hung open on leather hinges. Rubber-tire swings hung in the silent air, uninhibited. The washing rocks at the river were empty, and the watermelon patches, if any, were left alone to heat their hidden liquors in the sun. Spiders started building new webs in abandoned huts; dust started to sift in from unpatched roofs in golden spicules. Here and there a fire, forgotten in the last rush, lingered and in a sudden access of strength fed upon the dry bones of some littered shack. The sound of a gentle feeding burn went up through the silenced air.

The men sat on the hardware porch, not blinking or swallowing.

"I can't figure why they left *now*. With things lookin' up. I mean, every day they got more rights. What they *want*, anyway? Here's the poll tax gone, and more and more states passin' anti-lynchin' bills, and all kinds of equal rights. What *more* they want? They make almost as good money as a white man, but there they go."

Far down the empty street a bicycle came.

"I'll be goddamned, Teece, here comes your Silly now!"

The bicycle pulled up before the porch, a seventeen-year-old colored boy on it, all arms and feet and long legs and round watermelon head. He looked up at Samuel Teece and smiled.

"So you got a guilty conscience and came back," said Teece.

"No, sir, I just brought the bicycle."

"What's wrong, couldn't get it on the rocket?"

"That wasn't it, sir."

"Don't tell me what it was! Get off, you're not goin' to steal my property!" He gave the boy a push. The bicycle fell. "Get inside and start cleaning the brass."

"Beg pardon?" The boy's eyes widened.

"You heard what I said. There's guns need unpacking there, and a crate of nails just come from Natchez—"

"Mr. Teece."

"And a box of hammers need fixin'—"

*'Mr.Teece, sir?"

"You *still* standin' there!" Teece glared.

"Mr. Teece, you don't mind I take the day off," he said apologetically.

"And tomorrow and day after tomorrow and the day after the day after that," said Teece.

"I'm afraid so, sir."

"You *should* be afraid, boy. Come here." He marched the boy across the porch and drew a paper out of a desk. "Remember this?"

"Sir?"

"It's your workin' paper. You signed it, there's your X right there, ain't it? Answer me."

"I didn't sign that, Mr. Teece." The boy trembled. "Anyone can make an X."

"Listen to this, Silly. Contract: 'I will work for Mr. Samuel Teece two years, starting July 15, 2001, and if intending to leave will give four weeks' notice and continue working until my position is filled.' There." Teece slapped the paper, his eyes glittering. "You cause trouble, we'll take it to court."

"I can't do that," wailed the boy, tears starting to roll down his face. "If I don't go today, I don't go."

"I know just how you feel, Silly; yes, sir, I sympathize with you, boy. But we'll treat you good and give you good food, boy. Now you just get inside and start working and forget all about that nonsense, eh, Silly? Sure." Teece grinned and patted the boy's shoulder.

The boy turned and looked at the old men sitting on the porch. He could hardly see now for his tears. "Maybe—maybe one of these gentlemen here..." The men looked up in the hot, uneasy shadows, looking first at the boy and then at Teece.

"You meanin' to say you think a *white man* should take your place, boy?" asked Teece coldly.

Grandpa Quartermain took his red hands off his knees. He looked out at the horizon thoughtfully and said, "Teece, what about me?"

"What?"

"I'll take Silly's job."

The porch was silent.

Teece balanced himself in the air. "Grandpa," he said warningly.

"Let the boy go. I'll clean the brass."

"Would you, would you, really?" Silly ran over to Grandpa, laughing, tears on his cheeks, unbelieving.

"Sure."

"Grandpa," said Teece, "keep your damn trap outa this."

"Give the kid a break, Teece."

Teece walked over and seized the boy's arm. "He's mine. I'm lockin' him in the back room until tonight."

"Don't, Mr. Teece!" The boy began to sob now. His crying filled the air of the porch. His eyes were tight. Far down the street an old tin Ford was choking along, approaching, a last load of colored people in it. "Here comes my family, Mr. Teece, oh, please, please, oh God, please!"

"Teece," said one of the other men on the porch, getting up, and "let him go."

Another man rose also. "That goes for me too."

"And me," said another.

"What's the use?" The men all talked now. "Cut it out, Teece."

"Let him go."

Teece felt for his gun in his pocket. He saw the men's faces. He took his hand away and left the gun in his pocket and said, "So that's how it is?"

"That's how it is," someone said.

Teece let the boy go. "All right. Get out." He jerked his hand back in the store. "But I hope you don't think you're gonna leave any trash behind to clutter my store."

"No, sir!"

"You clean everything outa your shed in back; burn it."

Silly shook his head. "I'll take it with."

"They won't let you put it on that damn rocket."

"I'll take it with," insisted the boy softly.

He rushed back through the hardware store. There were sounds of sweeping and cleaning out, and a moment later he appeared, his hands full of tops and marbles and old dusty kites and junk collected through the years. Just then the old tin Ford drove up and Silly climbed in and the door slammed. Teece stood on the porch with a bitter smile. "What you goin' to do *up there*?"

"Startin' new," said Silly. "Gonna have my *own* hardware."

"God damn it, you been learnin' my trade so you could run off and use it!"

"No, sir, I never thought one day *this'd* happen, sir, but it did. I can't help it if I learned, Mr. Teece."

"I suppose you got names for your rockets?"

They looked at their one clock on the dashboard of the car.

"Yes, sir."

"Like Elijah and the Chariot, The Big Wheel and The Little Wheel, Faith, Hope, and Charity, eh?"

"We got names for the ships, Mr. Teece."

"God the Son and the Holy Ghost, I wouldn't wonder? Say, boy, you got one named the First Baptist Church?"

"We got to leave now, Mr. Teece."

Teece laughed. "You got one named Swing Low, and another named Sweet Chariot?"

The car started up. "Good-by, Mr. Teece."

"You got one named Roll Dem Bones?"

"Good-by, mister!"

"And another called Over Jordan! Ha! Well, tote that rocket, boy, lift that rocket, boy, go on, get blown up, see if *I* care!"

The car churned off into the dust. The boy rose and cupped his hands to his mouth and shouted one last time at Teece: "Mr. Teece, Mr. Teece, what *you* goin' to do nights from now on? What you goin' to *do* nights, Mr. Teece?"

Silence. The car faded down the road. It was gone. "What in hell did he mean?" mused Teece. "What am I goin' to *do* nights?"

He watched the dust settle, and it suddenly came to him.

He remembered nights when men drove to his house, their knees sticking up sharp and their shotguns sticking up sharper, like a carful of cranes under the night trees of summer, their eyes mean. Honking the horn and him slamming his door, a gun in his hand, laughing to himself, his heart racing like a ten-year-old's, driving off down the summer-night road, a ring of hemp rope coiled on the car floor, fresh shell boxes making every man's coat look bunchy. How many nights over the years, how many nights of the wind rushing in the car, flopping their hair over their mean eyes, roaring, as they picked a tree, a good strong tree, and rapped on a shanty door!

"So *that's* what the son of a bitch meant?" Teece leaped out into the sunlight.

"Come back, you bastard! What am I goin' to do nights? Why, that lousy, insolent son of a..."

It was a good question. He sickened and was empty. Yes. What *will* we do nights? he thought. Now *they're* gone, what? He was absolutely empty and numb.

He pulled the pistol from his pocket, checked its load.

"What you goin' to do, Sam?" someone asked.

"Kill that son of a bitch."

Grandpa said, "Don't get yourself heated."

But Samuel Teece was gone around behind the store. A moment later he drove out the drive in his open-top car. "Anyone comin' with me?"

"I'd like a drive," said Grandpa, and got up.

"Anyone else?"

Nobody replied.

Grandpa got in and slammed the door. Samuel Teece gutted the car out in a great whorl of dust. They didn't speak as they rushed down the road under the bright sky. The heat from the dry meadows was shimmering.

They stopped at a crossroad. "Which way'd they go, Grandpa?"

Grandpa squinted. "Straight on ahead, I figure."

They went on. Under the summer trees their car made a lonely sound. The road was empty, and as they drove along they began to notice something. Teece slowed the car and bent out, his yellow eyes fierce.

"God damn it, Grandpa, you see what them bastards did?"

"What?" asked Grandpa, and looked.

Where they had been carefully set down and left, in neat bundles every few feet along the empty country road, were old roller skates, a bandanna full of knickknacks, some old shoes, a cartwheel, stacks of pants and coats and ancient hats, bits of oriental crystal that had once tinkled in the wind, tin cans of pink geraniums, dishes of waxed fruit, cartons of Confederate money, washtubs, scrubboards, wash lines, soap, somebody's tricycle, someone else's hedge shears, a toy wagon, a jack-in-the-box, a stained-glass window from the Negro Baptist Church, a whole set of brake rims, inner tubes, mattresses, couches, rocking chairs, jars of cold cream, hand mirrors. None of it flung down, no, but deposited gently and with feeling, with decorum, upon the dusty edges of the road, as if a whole city had walked here with hands full, at which time a great bronze trumpet had sounded, the articles had been relinquished to the quiet dust, and one and all, the inhabitants of the earth had fled straight up into the blue heavens.

"Wouldn't burn them, they said," cried Teece angrily. "No, wouldn't burn them like I said, but had to take them along and leave them where they could see them for the last time, on the road, all together and whole. Them niggers think they're smart."

He veered the car wildly, mile after mile, down the road, tumbling, smashing, breaking, scattering bundles of paper, jewel boxes, mirrors, chairs. "There, by damn, and *there*!"

The front tire gave a whistling cry. The car spilled crazily off the road into a ditch, flinging Teece against the glass.

"Son of a bitch!" He dusted himself off and stood out of the car, almost crying with rage.

He looked at the silent, empty road. "We'll never catch them now, never, never." As far as he could see there was nothing but bundles and stacks and more bundles neatly placed like little abandoned shrines in the late day, in the warm-blowing wind.

Teece and Grandpa came walking tiredly back to the hardware store an hour later. The men were still sitting there, listening, and watching the sky. Just as Teece sat down and eased his tight shoes off someone cried, "Look!"

"I'll be d*amned* if I will," said Teece.

But the others looked. And they saw the golden bobbins rising in the sky, far away. Leaving flame behind, they vanished.

In the cotton fields the wind blew idly among the snow clusters. In still farther meadows the watermelons lay, unfingerprinted, striped like tortoise cats lying in the sun.

The men on the porch sat down, looked at each other, looked at the yellow rope piled neat on the store shelves, glanced at the gun shells glinting shiny brass in their cartons, saw the silver pistols and long black metal shotguns hung high and quiet in the shadows. Somebody put a straw in his mouth. Someone else drew a figure in the dust.

Finally Samuel Teece held his empty shoe up in triumph, turned it over, stared at it, and said, "Did you notice? Right up to the very last, by God, he said 'Mister'!"

The Other Foot

When they heard the news they came out of the restaurants and cafés and hotels and looked at the sky. They lifted their dark hands over their upturned white eyes. Their mouths hung wide. In the hot noon for thousands of miles there were little towns where the dark people stood with their shadows under them, looking up.

In her kitchen Hattie Johnson covered the boiling soup, wiped her thin fingers on a cloth, and walked carefully to the back porch.

"Come on, Ma! Hey, Ma, come on—you'll miss it!"

"Hey, Mom!"

Three little Negro boys danced around in the dusty yard, yelling. Now and then they looked at the house frantically.

"I'm coming," said Hattie, and opened the screen door. "Where you hear this rumor?"

"Up at Jones's, Ma. They say a rocket's coming, first one in twenty years, with a white man in it!"

"What's a white man? I never seen one."

"You'll find out," said Hattie. "Yes indeed, you'll find out."

"Tell us about one, Ma. Tell like you did."

Hattie frowned. "Well, it's been a long time. I was a little girl, you see. That was back in 1965."

"Tell us about a white man, Mom!"

She came and stood in the yard, looking up at the blue clear Martian sky with the thin white Martian clouds, and in the distance the Martian hills broiling in the heat. She said at last, "Well, first of all, they got white hands."

"White hands!" The boys joked, slapping each other.

"And they got white arms."

"White arms!" hooted the boys.

"And white faces."

"White faces! *Really*?"

"White like *this*, Mom?" The smallest threw dust on his face, sneezing. "This way?"

"Whiter than that," she said gravely, and turned to the sky again. There was a troubled thing in her eyes, as if she was looking for a thundershower up high, and not seeing it made her worry. "Maybe you better go inside."

"Oh, Mom!" They stared at her in disbelief. "We got to watch, we just got to. Nothing's going to happen, is it?"

"I don't know. I got a feeling, is all."

"We just want to see the ship and maybe run down to the port and see that white man. What's he like, huh, Mom?"

"I don't know. I just don't know," she mused, shaking her head.

"Tell us some more!"

"Well, the white people live on Earth, which is where we all come from, twenty years ago. We just up and walked away and came to Mars and set down and built towns and here we are. Now we're Martians instead of Earth people. And no white men've come up here in all that time. That's the story."

"Why didn't they come up, Mom?"

"Well, 'cause. Right after we got up here, Earth got in an atom war. They blew each other up terribly. They forgot us. When they finished fighting, after years, they didn't have any rockets. Took them until recently to build more. So here they come now, twenty years later, to visit." She gazed at her children numbly and then began to walk. "You wait here. I'm going down the line to Elizabeth Brown's house. You promise to stay?"

"We don't want to but we will."

"All right, then." And she ran off down the road.

At the Browns' she arrived in time to see everybody packed into the family car. "Hey there, Hattie! Come on along!"

"Where you going?" she said, breathlessly running up.

"To see the white man!"

"That's right," said Mr. Brown seriously. He waved at his load. "These children never saw one, and I almost forgot."

"What you going to do with that white man?" asked Hattie.

"Do?" said everyone. "Why—just *look* at him, is all."

"You sure?"

"What else can we do?"

"I don't know," said Hattie. "I just thought there might be trouble."

"What kind of trouble!"

"You *know*," said Hattie vaguely, embarrassed. "You ain't going to lynch him?"

"Lynch him?" Everyone laughed. Mr. Brown slapped his knee. "Why, bless you, child, no! We're going to shake his hand. Ain't we, everyone?"

"Sure, sure!"

Another car drove up from another direction and Hattie gave a cry. "Willie!"

"What you doing 'way down here? Where're the kids?" shouted her husband angrily. He glared at the others. "You going down like a bunch of fools to see that man come in?"

"That appears to be just right," agreed Mr. Brown, nodding and smiling.

"Well, take your guns along," said Willie. "I'm on my way home for mine right now!"

"Willie!"

"You get in this car, Hattie." He held the door open firmly, looking at her until she obeyed. Without another word to the others he roared the car down the dusty road.

"Willie, not so fast!"

"Not so fast, huh? We'll see about that." He watched the road tear under the car. "What right they got coming up here this late? Why don't they leave us in peace? Why didn't they blow themselves up on that old world and let us be?"

"Willie, that ain't no Christian way to talk."

"I'm not feeling Christian," he said savagely, gripping the wheel. "I'm just feeling mean. After all them years of doing what they did to our folks—my mom and dad, and your mom and dad—You remember? You remember how they hung my father on Knockwood Hill and shot my mother? You remember? Or you got a memory that's short like the others?"

"I remember," she said.

"You remember Dr. Phillips and Mr. Burton and their big houses, and my mother's washing shack, and Dad working when he was old, and the thanks he got was being hung by Dr. Phillips and Mr. Burton. Well," said Willie, "the shoe's on the other foot now. We'll see who gets laws passed against him, who gets lynched, who rides the back of streetcars, who gets segregated in shows. We'll just wait and see."

"Oh, Willie, you're talking trouble."

"Everybody's talking. Everybody's thought on this day, thinking it'd never be. Thinking, What kind of day would it be if the white man ever came up here to Mars? But here's the day, and we can't run away."

"Ain't you going to let the white people live up here?"

"Sure." He smiled, but it was a wide, mean smile, and his eyes were mad. "They can come up and live and work here, why, certainly. All they got to do to deserve it is live in their own small part of town, the slums, and shine our shoes for us, and mop up our trash, and sit in the last row in the balcony. That's all we ask. And once a week we hang one or two of them. Simple."

"You don't sound human, and I don't like it."

"You'll have to get used to it," he said. He braked the car to a stop before the house and jumped out. "Find my guns and some rope. We'll do this right."

"Oh, Willie," she wailed, and just sat there in the car while he ran up the steps and slammed the front door.

She went along. She didn't want to go along, but he rattled around in the attic, cursing like a crazy man until he found four guns. She saw the brutal metal of them glittering in the black attic, and she couldn't see him at all, he was so dark; she heard only his swearing, and at last his long legs came climbing down from the attic in a shower of dust, and he stacked up bunches of brass shells and blew out the gun chambers and clicked shells into them. his face stern and heavy and folded in upon the gnawing bitterness there. "Leave us alone," he kept muttering, his hands flying away from him suddenly, uncontrolled. "Leave us blame alone, why don't they?"

"Willie, Willie."

"You too—you too." And he gave her the same look, and a pressure of his hatred touched her mind.

Outside the window the boys gabbled to each other. "White as milk, she said. White as milk."

"White as this old flower, you see?"

"White as a stone, like chalk you write with."

Willie plunged out of the house. "You children come inside, I'm locking you up. You ain't seeing no white man, you ain't talking about them, you ain't doing nothing. Come on now."

"But, Daddy—"

He shoved them through the door and went and fetched a bucket of paint and a stencil and from the garage a long thick hairy rope coil into which he fashioned a hangman's knot, very carefully watching the sky while his hands felt their way at their task.

And then they were in the car, leaving bolls of dust behind them down the road. "Slow up, Willie."

"This is no slowing-up time," he said. "This is a hurrying time, and I'm hurrying."

All along the road people were looking up in the sky, or climbing in their cars, or riding in cars, and guns were sticking up out of some cars like telescopes sighting all the evils of a world coming to an end.

She looked at the guns. "You been talking," she accused her husband.

"That's what I been doing," he grunted, nodding. He watched the road, fiercely. "I stopped at every house and I told them what to do, to get their guns, to get paint, to bring rope and be ready. And here we all are, the welcoming committee, to give them the key to the city. Yes, sir!"

She pressed her thin dark hands together to push away the terror growing in her now, and she felt the car bucket and lurch around other cars. She heard the voices yelling, Hey, Willie, look! and hands holding up ropes and guns as they rushed by! and mouths smiling at them in the swift rushing.

"Here we are," said Willie, and braked the car into dusty halting and silence. He kicked the door open with a big foot and, laden with weapons, stepped out, lugging them across the airport meadow.

"Have you *thought*, Willie?"

"That's all I done for twenty years. I was sixteen when I left Earth, and I was glad to leave," he said. "There wasn't anything there for me or you or anybody like us. I've never been sorry I left. We've had peace here, the first time we ever drew a solid breath. Now, come on."

He pushed through the dark crowd which came to meet him.

"Willie, Willie, what we gonna do?" they said.

"Here's a gun," he said. "Here's a gun. Here's another." He passed them out with savage jabs of his arms. "Here's a pistol. Here's a shotgun."

The people were so close together it looked like one dark body with a thousand arms reaching out to take the weapons. "Willie, Willie."

His wife stood tall and silent by him, her fluted lips pressed shut, and her large eyes wet and tragic. "Bring the paint," he said to her. And she lugged a gallon can of yellow paint across the field to where, at that moment, a trolley car was pulling up,

with a fresh-painted sign on its front, To The White Man's Landing, full of talking people who got off and ran across the meadow, stumbling, looking up. Women with picnic boxes, men with straw hats, in shirt sleeves. The streetcar stood humming and empty. Willie climbed up, set the paint cans down, opened them, stirred the paint, tested a brush, drew forth a stencil, and climbed up on a seat.

"Hey, there!" The conductor came around behind him, his coin changer jangling. "What you think you're doing? Get down off there!"

"You see what I'm doing. Keep your shirt on."

And Willie began the stenciling in yellow paint. He dabbed on an *F* and an *O* and an *R* with terrible pride in his work. And when he finished it the conductor squinted up and read the fresh glinting yellow words: For Whites: Rear Section. He read it again. For Whites. He blinked. Rear Section. The conductor looked at Willie and began to smile.

"Does that suit you?" asked Willie, stepping down.

Said the conductor, "That suits me just fine, sir."

Hattie was looking at the sign from outside, and holding her hands over her breasts.

Willie returned to the crowd, which was growing now, taking size from every auto that groaned to a halt, and every new trolley car which squealed around the bend from the nearby town.

Willie climbed up on a packing box. "Let's have a delegation to paint every streetcar in the next hour. Volunteers?"

Hands leapt up.

"Get going!"

They went.

"Let's have a delegation to fix theater seats, roped off, the last two rows for whites."

More hands.

"Go on!"

They ran off.

Willie peered around, bubbled with perspiration, panting with exertion, proud of his energy, his hands on his wife's shoulder who stood under him looking at the ground with her downcast eyes. "Let's see now," he declared. "Oh yes. We got to pass a law this afternoon; no intermarriages!"

"That's right," said a lot of people.

"All shoeshine boys quit their jobs today."

"Quittin' right now!" Some men threw down the rags they carried, in their excitement, all across town.

"Got to pass a minimum wage law, don't we?"

"Sure!"

"Pay them white folks at least ten cents an hour."

"That's right!"

The mayor of the town hurried up. "Now look here, Willie Johnson. Get down off that box!"

"Mayor, I can't be made to do nothing like that."

"You're making a mob, Willie Johnson."

"That's the idea."

"The same thing you always hated when you were a kid. You're no better than some of those white men you yell about!"

"This is the other shoe, Mayor, and the other foot," said Willie, not even looking at the mayor, looking at the faces beneath him, some of them smiling, some of them doubtful, others bewildered, some of them reluctant and drawing away, fearful.

"You'll be sorry," said the mayor.

"We'll have an election and get a new mayor," said Willie. And he glanced off at the town where up and down the street signs were being hung, fresh-painted: LIMITED CLIENTELE *Right to serve customer revocable at any time.* He grinned and slapped his hands. Lord! And streetcars were being halted and sections being painted white in back, to suggest their future inhabitants. And theaters were being invaded and roped off by chuckling men, while their wives stood wondering on the curbs and children were spanked into houses to be hid away from this awful time.

"Are we all ready?" called Willie Johnson, the rope in his hands with the noose tied and neat.

"Ready!" shouted half the crowd. The other half murmured and moved like figures in a nightmare in which they wished no participation.

"Here it comes!" called a small boy.

Like marionette heads on a single string, the heads of the crowd turned upward.

Across the sky, very high and beautiful, a rocket burned on a sweep of orange fire. It circled and came down, causing all to gasp. It landed, setting the meadow afire here and there; the fire burned out, the rocket lay a moment in quiet, and then, as the silent crowd watched, a great door in the side of the vessel whispered out a breath of oxygen, the door slid back and an old man stepped out.

"A white man, a white man, a white man..." The words traveled back in the expectant crowd, the children speaking in each other's ears, whispering, butting each other, the words moving in ripples to where the crowd stopped and the streetcars stood in the windy sunlight, the smell of paint coming out their opened windows. The whispering wore itself away and it was gone.

No one moved.

The white man was tall and straight, but a deep weariness was in his face. He had not shaved this day, and his eyes were as old as the eyes of a man can be and still be alive. His eyes were colorless; almost white and sightless with things he had seen in the passing years. He was as thin as a winter bush. His hands trembled and he had to lean against the portway of the ship as he looked out over the crowd.

He put out a hand and half smiled, but drew his hand back.

No one moved.

He looked down into their faces, and perhaps he saw but did not see the guns and the ropes, and perhaps he smelled the paint. No one ever asked him. He began to talk. He started very quietly and slowly, expecting no interruptions, and receiving none, and his voice was very tired and old and pale.

"It doesn't matter who I am," he said. "I'd be just a name to you, anyhow. I don't know your names, either. That'll come later." He paused, closed his eyes for a moment, and then continued:

"Twenty years ago you left Earth. That's a long, long time. It's more like twenty centuries, so much has happened. After you left, the War came." He nodded slowly. "Yes, the *big* one. The Third One. It went on for a long time. Until last year. We bombed all of the cities of the world. We destroyed New York and London and Moscow and Paris and Shanghai and Bombay and Alexandria. We ruined it all. And when we finished with the big cities we went to the little cities and atom-bombed and burned them."

Now he began to name cities and places, and streets. And as he named them, a murmur rose up in his audience.

"We destroyed Natchez..."

A murmur.

"And Columbus, Georgia..."

Another murmur.

"We burned New Orleans..."

A sigh.

"And Atlanta..."

Still another.

"And there was nothing left of Greenwater, Alabama."

Willie Johnson jerked his head and his mouth opened. Hattie saw this gesture, and the recognition coming into his dark eyes.

"Nothing was left," said the old man in the port, speaking slowly. "Cotton fields, burned."

Oh, said everyone.

"Cotton mills bombed out—"

"Oh."

"And the factories, radioactive; everything radioactive. All the roads and the farms and the foods, radioactive. Everything." He named more names of towns and villages.

"Tampa."

"That's my town," someone whispered.

"Fulton."

"That's mine," someone else said.

"Memphis."

"Memphis. Did they burn *Memphis*?" A shocked query.

"Memphis, blown up."

"*Fourth* Street in Memphis?"

"All of it," said the old man.

It was stirring them now. After twenty years it was rushing back. The towns and the places, the trees and the brick buildings, the signs and the churches and the familiar stores, all of it was coming to the surface among the gathered people. Each name touched memory, and there was no one present without a thought of another day. They were all old enough for that, save the children.

"Laredo."

"I remember Laredo."

"New York City."

"I had a store in Harlem."

"Harlem, bombed out."

The ominous words. The familiar, remembered places. The struggle to imagine all of those places in ruins.

Willie Johnson murmured the words, "Greenwater, Alabama. That's where I was born. I remember."

Gone. All of it gone. The man said so.

The man continued, "So we destroyed everything and ruined everything, like the fools that we were and the fools that we are. We killed millions. I don't think there are more than five hundred thousand people left in the world, all kinds and types. And out of all the wreckage we salvaged enough metal to build this one rocket, and we came to Mars in it this month to seek your help."

He hesitated and looked down among the faces to see what could be found there, but he was uncertain.

Hattie Johnson felt her husband's arm tense, saw his fingers grip the rope.

"We've been fools," said the old man quietly. "We've brought the Earth and civilization down about our heads. None of the cities are worth saving—they'll be radioactive for a century. Earth is over and done with. Its age is through. You have rockets here which you haven't tried to use to return to Earth in twenty years. Now I've come to ask you to use them. To come to Earth, to pick up the survivors and bring them back to Mars. To help us go on at this time. We've been stupid. Before God we admit our stupidity and our evilness. All the Chinese and the Indians and the Russians and the British and the Americans. We're asking to be taken in. Your Martian soil has lain fallow for numberless centuries; there's room for everyone; it's good soil—I've seen your fields from above. We'll come and work it *for* you. Yes, we'll even do that. We deserve anything you want to do to us, but don't shut us out. We can't force you to act now. If you want I'll get into my ship and go back and that will be all there is to it. We won't bother you again. But we'll come here and we'll work for you and do the things you did for us—clean your houses, cook your meals, shine your shoes, and humble ourselves in the sight of God for the things we have done over the centuries to ourselves, to others, to you."

He was finished.

There was a silence of silences. A silence you could hold in your hand and a silence that came down like a pressure of a distant storm over the crowd. Their long arms hung like dark pendulums in the sunlight, and their eyes were upon the old man and he did not move now, but waited.

Willie Johnson held the rope in his hands. Those around him watched to see what he might do. His wife Hattie waited, clutching his arm.

She wanted to get at the hate of them all, to pry at it and work at it until she found a little chink, and then pull out a pebble or a stone or a brick and then a part of the wall, and, once started, the whole edifice might roar down and be done away with.

It was teetering now. But which was the keystone, and how to get at it? How to touch them and get a thing started in all of them to make a ruin of their hate?

She looked at Willie there in the strong silence and the only thing she knew about the situation was him and his life and what had happened to him, and suddenly he was the keystone; suddenly she knew that if he could be pried loose, then the thing in all of them might be loosened and torn away.

"Mister—" She stepped forward. She didn't even know the first words to say. The crowd stared at her back; she felt them staring. "Mister—"

The man turned to her with a tired smile.

"Mister," she said, "do you know Knockwood Hill in Greenwater, Alabama?"

The old man spoke over his shoulder to someone within the ship. A moment later a photographic map was handed out and the man held it, waiting.

"You know the big oak on top of that hill, mister?"

The big oak. The place where Willie's father was shot and hung and found swinging in the morning wind.

"Yes."

"Is that still there?" asked Hattie.

"It's gone," said the old man. "Blown up. The hill's all gone, and the oak tree too. You see?" He touched the photograph.

"Let me see that," said Willie, jerking forward and looking at the map.

Hattie blinked at the white man, heart pounding.

"Tell me about Greenwater," she said quickly.

"What do you want to know?"

"About Dr. Phillips. Is he still alive?"

A moment in which the information was found in a clicking machine within the rocket...

"Killed in the war."

"And his son?"

"Dead."

"What about their house?"

"Burned. Like all the other houses."

"What about that other big tree on Knockwood Hill?"

"All the trees went—burned."

"*That* tree went, you're sure?" said Willie.

"Yes."

Willie's body loosened somewhat.

"And what about that Mr. Burton's house and Mr. Burton?"

"No houses at all left, no people."

"You know Mrs. Johnson's washing shack, my mother's place?"

The place where she was shot.

"That's gone too. Everything's gone. Here are the pictures, you can see for yourself."

The pictures were there to be held and looked at and thought about. The rocket was full of pictures and answers to questions. Any town, any building, any place.

Willie stood with the rope in his hands.

He was remembering Earth, the green Earth and the green town where he was born and raised, and he was thinking now of that town, gone to pieces, to ruin, blown up and scattered, all of the landmarks with it, all of the supposed or certain evil scattered with it, all of the hard men gone, the stables, the ironsmiths, the curio shops, the soda founts, the gin mills, the river bridges, the lynching trees, the buckshot-covered hills, the roads, the cows, the mimosas, and his own house as well as those big-pillared houses down near the long river, those white mortuaries where the women as delicate as moths fluttered in the autumn light, distant, far away. Those houses where the cold men rocked, with glasses of drink in their hands, guns leaned against the porch newels, sniffing the autumn airs and considering death. Gone, all gone; gone and never coming back. Now, for certain, all of that civilization ripped into confetti and strewn at their feet. Nothing, nothing of it left to hate—not an empty brass gun shell, or a twisted hemp, or a tree, or even a hill of it to hate. Nothing but some alien people in a rocket, people who might shine his shoes and ride in the back of trolleys or sit far up in midnight theaters...

"You won't have to do that," said Willie Johnson.

His wife glanced at his big hands.

His fingers were opening.

The rope, released, fell and coiled upon itself along the ground.

They ran through the streets of their town and tore down the new signs so quickly made, and painted out the fresh yellow signs on streetcars, and they cut down the ropes in the theater balconies, and unloaded their guns and stacked their ropes away.

"A new start for everyone," said Hattie, on the way home in their car.

"Yes," said Willie at last. "The Lord's let us come through, a few here and a few there. And what happens next is up to all of us. The time for being fools is over. We got to be something else except fools. I knew that when he talked. I knew then that now the white man's as lonely as we've always been. He's got no home now, just like we didn't have one for so long. Now everything's even. We can start all over again, on the same level."

He stopped the car and sat in it, not moving, while Hattie went to let the children out. They ran down to see their father. "You see the white man? You see him?" they cried.

"Yes, sir," said Willie, sitting behind the wheel, rubbing his face with his slow fingers. "Seems like for the first time today I really seen the white man—I really seen him clear."

The Wheel

They sang on their way. They sang *Joshua Saw the Wheel*, and they sang *Go Down, Moses*, and they sang a lot of other songs. They sang songs of all kinds, but they missed Mars.

They missed Mars and went on out and came back to try to find it and missed it again and tried to find Earth and missed Earth and finally landed upon Venus. And Venus was a warm jungle place where you threw seeds in the soil and they grew up in an hour, and you didn't need a house, only a roof against the heat and the rain, and they settled there, the black people, and no one ever knew what happened to them, and they were happy.

The Love Affair

All morning long the scent was in the clear air, of cut grain or green grass or flowers, Sio didn't know which, he couldn't tell. He would walk down the hill from his secret cave and turn about and raise his fine head and strain his eyes to see, and the breeze blew steadily, raising the tide of sweet odor about him. It was like a spring in autumn. He looked for the dark flowers that clustered under the hard rocks, probing up, but found none. He searched for a sign of grass, that swift tide that rolled over Mars for a brief week each spring, but the land was bone and pebble and the color of blood.

Sio returned to his cave, frowning. He watched the sky and saw the rockets of the Earthmen blaze down, far away, near the newly building towns. Sometimes, at night, he crept in a quiet, swimming silence down the canals by boat, lodged the boat in a hidden place, and then swam, with quiet hands and limbs, to the edge of the fresh towns, and there peered out at the hammering, nailing, painting men, at the men shouting late into the night at their labor of constructing a strange thing upon this planet. He would listen to their odd language and try to understand, and watch the rockets gather up great plumes of beautiful fire and go booming into the stars; an incredible people. And then, alive and undiseased, alone, Sio would return to his cave. Sometimes he walked many miles through the mountains to find others of his own hiding race, a few men, fewer women, to talk to, but now he had a habit of solitude, and lived alone, thinking on the destiny that had finally killed his people. He did not blame the Earthmen; it had been an accidental thing, the disease that had burned his father and mother in their sleep, and burned the fathers and mothers of great multitudes of sons.

He sniffed the air again. That strange aroma. That sweet, drifting scent of compounded flowers and green moss.

"What is it?" He narrowed his golden eyes in four directions.

He was tall and a boy still, though eighteen summers had lengthened the muscles in his arms and his legs were long from seasons of swimming in the canals and daring to run, take cover, run again, take swift cover, over the blazing dead sea bottoms or going on the long patrols with silver cages to bring back assassin-flowers and fire-lizards to feed them. It seemed that his life had been full of swimming and marching, the things young men do to take their energies and passions, until they are married and a woman soon does what mountains and rivers once did. He had carried the passion for distance and walking later into young manhood than

most, and while many another man had been drifting off down the dying canals in a slim boat with a woman like a bas-relief across his body, Sio had continued leaping and sporting, much of the time by himself, often speaking alone to himself. The worry of his parents, he had been, and the despair of women who had watched his shadow lengthening handsomely from the hour of his fourteenth birthday, and nodded to each other, watching the calendar for another year and just *another* year to pass....

But since the invasion and the disease, he had slowed to stillness. His universe was sunken away by death. The sawed and hammered and freshly painted towns were carriers of disease. The weight of so much dying rested heavily on his dreams. Often he woke weeping and put his hands out on the night air. But his parents were gone and it was time, past time, for one special friend, one touching, one love.

The wind was circling and spreading the bright odor. Sio took a deeper breath and felt his flesh warm.

And then there was a sound. It was like a small orchestra playing. The music came up through the narrow stone valley to his cave.

A puff of smoke idled into the sky about a half mile away. Below, by the ancient canal, stood a small house that the men of Earth had built for an archaeological crew, a year ago. It had been abandoned and Sio had crept down to peer into the empty rooms several times, not entering, for he was afraid of the black disease that might touch him.

The music was coming from that house.

"An entire orchestra in that small house?" he wondered, and ran silently down the valley in the early afternoon light.

The house looked empty, despite the music which poured out the open windows. Sio scrambled from rock to rock, taking half an hour to lie within thirty yards of the frightful, dinning house. He lay on his stomach, keeping close to the canal. If anything happened, he could leap into the water and let the current rush him swiftly back into the hills.

The music rose, crashed over the rocks, hummed in the hot air, quivered in his bones. Dust shook from the quaking roof of the house. Paint fell in a soft snowstorm from the peeling wood.

Sio leapt up and dropped back. He could see no orchestra within. Only flowery curtains. The front door stood wide.

The music stopped and started again. The same tune was repeated ten times. And the odor that had lured him down from his stone retreat was thick here, like a clear water moving about his perspiring face.

At last, in a burst of running, he reached the window, looked in.

Upon a low table, a brown machine glistened. In the machine, a silver needle pressed a spinning black disc. The orchestra thundered! Sio stared at the strange device.

The music paused. In that interval of hissing quiet, he heard footsteps. Running, he plunged into the canal.

Falling down under the cool water, he lay at the bottom, holding his breath, waiting. Had it been a trap? Had they lured him down to capture and kill him?

A minute ticked by, bubbles escaped his nostrils. He stirred and rose slowly toward the glassy wet world above. He was swimming and looking up through the cool green current when he saw her.

Her face was like a white stone above him.

He did not move, nor stir for a moment, but he saw her. He held his breath. He let the current slide him slowly, slowly away, and she was very beautiful, she was from Earth, she had come in a rocket that scorched the land and baked the air, and she was as white as a stone.

The canal water carried him among the hills. He climbed out, dripping.

She was beautiful, he thought. He sat on the canal rim, gasping. His chest was constricted. The blood burned in his face. He looked at his hands. Was the black disease in him? Had looking at her contaminated him?

I should have gone up, he thought, as she bent down, and clasped my hands to her neck. She killed us, she killed us. He saw her white throat, her white shoulders. What a peculiar color, he thought. But, no, he thought, she did not kill us. It was the disease. In so much whiteness, can darkness stay?

"Did she see me?" He stood up, drying in the sun. He put his hand to his chest, his brown, slender hand. He felt his heart beating rapidly. "Oh," he said. "I saw *her*!"

He walked back to the cave, not slowly, not swiftly. The music still crashed from the house below, like a festival all to itself.

Without speaking, he began, certainly and accurately, to pack his belongings. He threw pieces of phosphorous chalk, food, and several books into a cloth, and tied them up firmly. He saw that his hands shook. He turned his fingers over, his eyes wide. He stood up hurriedly, the small packet under one arm, and walked out of the cave and started up the canyon, away from the music and the strong perfume.

He did not look back.

The sun was going down the sky now. He felt his shadow move away behind to stay where he should have stayed. It was not good, leaving the cave where he had often lived as a child. In that cave he had found for himself a dozen hobbies, developed a hundred tastes. He had hollowed a kiln in the rock and baked himself fresh cakes each day, of a marvelous texture and variety. He had raised grain for food in a little mountain field. He had made himself clear, sparkling wines. He had created musical instruments, flutes of silver and thorn-metal, and small harps. He had written songs. He had built small chairs and woven the fabric of his clothing. And he had painted pictures on the cave walls in crimson and cobalt phosphorous, pictures that glowed through the long nights, pictures of great intricacy and beauty. And he had often read a book of poems that he had written when he was fifteen and which, proudly, but calmly, his parents had read aloud to a select few. It had been a good existence, the cave, his small arts.

As the sun was setting, he reached the top of the mountain pass. The music was gone. The scent was gone. He sighed and sat to rest a moment before going on over the mountains. He shut his eyes.

A white face came down through green water.

He put his fingers to his shut eyes, feeling.

White arms gestured through currents of rushing tide.

He started up, seized his packet of keepsakes, and was about to hurry off, when the wind shifted.

Faintly, faintly, there was the music. The insane, metallic blaring, music, miles away.

Faintly, the last fragrance of perfume found its way among the rocks.

As the moons were rising, Sio turned and found his way back to the cave.

The cave was cold and alien. He built a fire and ate a small dinner of bread and wild berries from the moss-rocks. So soon, after he had left it, the cave had grown cold and hard. His own breathing sounded strangely off the walls.

He extinguished the fire and lay down to sleep. But now there was a dim shaft of light touching the cave wall. He knew that this light had traveled half a mile up from the windows of the house by the canal. He shut his eyes but the light was there. It was either the light or the music or the smell of flowers. He found himself looking or listening or breathing for any one of the incredible three.

At midnight he stood outside his cave.

Like a bright toy, the house lights were yellow in the valley. In one of the windows, it seemed he saw a figure dancing.

"I must go down and kill her," he said. "*That* is why I came back to the cave. To kill, to bury her."

When he was half-asleep, he heard a lost voice say, "You are a great liar." He did not open his eyes.

She lived alone. On the second day, he saw her walking in the foothills. On the third day, she was swimming, swimming for hours, in the canal. On the fourth day and the fifth day, Sio came down nearer and nearer to the house, until, at sunset at the sixth day, with dark closing in, he stood outside the window of the house and watched the woman living there.

She sat at a table upon which stood twenty tiny brass tubes of red color. She slapped a white, cool-looking cream on her face, making a mask. She wiped it on tissues which she threw in a basket. She tested one tube of color, pressing in on her wide lips, clamping her lips together, wiping it, adding another color, wiping *it* off, testing a third, a fifth, a ninth color, touching her cheeks with red, also, tweezing her brows with a silver pincers. Rolling her hair up in incomprehensible devices, she buffed her fingernails while she sang a sweet strange alien song, a song in her own language, a song that must have been very beautiful. She hummed it, tapping her high heels on the hardwood floor. She sang it walking about the room, clothed only in her white body, or lying on the bed in her white flesh, her head down, the yellow hair flaming back to the floor, while she held a fire cylinder to her red, red lips, sucking, eyes closed, to let long slow chutes of smoke slip out her pinched nostrils and lazy mouth into great ghost forms on the air. Sio trembled. The ghosts. The strange ghosts from her mouth. So casually. So easily. Without looking at them, she created them.

Her feet, when she arose, exploded on the hardwood floor. Again she sang. She whirled about. She sang to the ceiling. She snapped her fingers. She put her hands out, like birds, flying, and danced alone, her heels cracking the floor, around, around.

The alien song. He wished he could understand. He wished that he had the ability that some of his own people often had, to project the mind, to read, to know, to interpret, instantly; foreign tongues, foreign thoughts. He tried. But there was nothing. She went on singing the beautiful, unknown song, none of which he could understand:

"Ain't misbehavin', I'm savin' my love for you..."

He grew faint, watching her Earth body, her Earth beauty, so totally different, something from so many millions of miles away. His hands were moist, his eyelids jerked unpleasantly.

A bell rang.

There she was, picking up a strange black instrument, the function of which was not unlike a similar device of Sio's people.

"Hello, Janice? God, it's good to hear from you!"

Sio smiled. She was talking to a distant town. Her voice was thrilling to hear. But what were the words?

"God, Janice, what a hell-out-of-the-way place you sent me to. I know, honey, a vacation. But, it's sixty miles from nowhere. All I do is play cards and swim in the damned canal."

The black machine buzzed in reply.

"I can't stand it here, Janice. I know, I know. The churches. It's a damn shame they ever came up here. Everything was going so nice. What *I* want to know is when do we open up again?"

Lovely, thought Sio. Gracious. Incredible. He stood in the night beyond her open window, looking at her amazing face and body. And what were they talking about? Art, literature, music, yes, music, for she sang, she sang all of the time. An odd music, but one could not expect to understand the music of another world. Or the customs or the language or the literature. One must judge by instinct alone. The old ideas must be set aside. It was to be admitted that her beauty was not like Martian beauty, the soft slim brown beauty of the dying race. His mother had had golden eyes and slender hips. But here, this one, singing alone in the desert, she was of larger stuffs, large breasts, large hips, and the legs, yes, of white fire, and the peculiar custom of walking about without clothes, with only those strange knocking slippers on the feet. But all women of Earth did that, yes? He nodded. You must understand. The women of that far world, naked, yellow-haired, large-bodied, loud-heeled, he could see them. And the magic with the mouth and nostrils. The ghosts, the souls issuing from the lips in smoky patterns. Certainly a magical creature of fire and imagination. She shaped bodies in the air, with her brilliant mind. What else but a mind of clarity and clear genius could drink the gray, cherry red fire, and plume out architectural perfections of intricate and fine beauty from her nostrils. The genius! An artist! A creator! How was it done, how many years might one study to do this? How did one apply one's time? His head whirled with her presence. He felt he must cry out to her, "Teach me!" But he was afraid. He felt like a child. He saw the forms, the lines, the smoke swirl into infinity. She was here, in the wilderness, to be alone, to create her fantasies in absolute security, unwatched. One did not bother creators, writers, painters. One stood back and kept one's thoughts silent.

What a people! he thought. Are all of the women of that fiery green world like this? Are they fiery ghosts and music? Do they walk blazingly naked in their loud houses?

"I must watch this," he said, half-aloud. "I must study."

He felt his hands curl. He wanted to touch. He wanted her to sing for him, to construct the artistic fragments in the air for him, to teach him, to tell him about that far gone world and its books and its fine music....

"God, Janice, but how soon? What about the other girls? What about the other towns?"

The telephone burred like an insect.

"All of them closed down? On the whole damn planet? There must be *one* place! If you don't find a place for me soon, I'll...!"

Everything was strange about it. It was like seeing a woman for the first time. The way she held her head back, the way she moved her red-fingernailed hands, all new and different. She crossed her white legs, leaning forward, her elbow on a bare knee, summoning and exhaling spirits, talking, squinting at the window where he, yes, he stood in shadow, she looked right through him, oh, if she knew, what would she do?

"Who, me, afraid of living out here alone?"

She laughed, Sio laughed in cadence, in the moonlit darkness. Oh the beauty of her alien laughter, her head thrown back, the mystic clouds jetting and shaping from her nostrils.

He had to turn away from the window, gasping.

"Yeah! Sure!"

What fine rare words of living, music, poetry was she speaking now?

"Well, Janice, who's afraid of any Martian? How many are left, a dozen, two dozen. Line 'em up, bring 'em on, right? Right!"

Her laughter followed as he stumbled blindly around the comer of her house, his feet thrashing a litter of bottles. Eyes shut, he saw the print of her phosphorous skin, the phantoms leaping from her mouth in sorceries and evocations of cloud, rain and wind. Oh, to translate! Oh, gods, to *know*. Listen! What's that word, and that, and, yes then, that!? Did she call out after him. No. Was that his name?

At the cave he ate but was not hungry.

He sat in the mouth of the cave for an hour, as the moons rose and hurtled across the cold sky and he saw his breath on the air, like the spirits, the fiery silences that breathed about her face, and she was talking, talking, he heard or did not hear her voice moving up the hill, among the rocks, and he could smell her breath, that breath of smoking promise, of warm words heated in her mouth.

And at last he thought, I will go down and speak to her very quietly, and speak to her every night until she understands what I say and I know her words and she then comes with me back into the hills where we will be content. I will tell her of my people and my being alone and how I have watched her and listened to her for so many nights....

But...she is Death.

He shivered. The thought, the words would not go away.

How could he have forgotten?

He need only touch her hand, her cheek, and he would wither in a few hours, a week at the latest. He would change color and fall in folds of ink and turn to ash, black fragments of leaf that would break and fly away in the wind.

One touch and...Death.

But a further thought came. She lives alone, away from the others of her race. She must like her own thoughts, to be so much apart. Are we not the same, then? And, because she is separate from the towns, perhaps the Death is not in her...? Yes! Perhaps!

How fine to be with her for a day, a week, a month, to swim with her in the canals, to walk in the hills and have her sing that strange song and he, in turn, would touch the old harp books and let them sing back to her! Wouldn't that be worth anything, everything? A man died when he was alone, did he not? So, consider the yellow lights in the house below. A month of real understanding and being and living with beauty and a maker of ghosts, the souls that came from the mouth, wouldn't it be a chance worth taking? And if death came...how fine and original it would be!

He stood up. He moved. He lit a candle in a niche of the cave where the images of his parents trembled in the light. Outside, the dark flowers waited for the dawn when they would quiver and open and she would be here to see them and tend them and walk with him in the hills. The moons were gone now. He had to fix his special sight to see the way.

He listened. Below in the night, the music played. Below in the dark, her voice spoke wonders across time. Below in the shadows, her white flesh burned, and the ghosts danced about her head.

He moved swiftly now.

At precisely nine forty-five that night, she heard the soft tapping at her front door.

The Marriage

It was a fine night in the Martian August. The double moons threw down a radiance that put away the shadows, and the warm sky was covered with a great variety of stars. It was a splendid night for the wedding.

Mr. Samuel Pace paused long enough in polishing his shoes to go to the window and look down into the open courtyard of this ancient Martian house. Torches were lit everywhere, flaring with a blue and now green and now ruby light. The illumination caused the tables of waiting food to shift in the light, the silver to dance, the wine to glint within the crystal vats. There was a good smell of the torchwood, and flowers picked in the furthest hills of Mars.

"What time is it?" asked Mr. Samuel Pace.

"That's the third time in five minutes. It's five minutes to eight." His best man, Thomas Quinn, grinned at him.

"Where are all the guests?"

"They'll be here. Don't worry."

"Is Elta ready?"

"Sure, sure, calm down."

"I want everything to go right."

"It will. Look."

A great rocket ship flowered out huge blooms of flame in the sky, settling to rest beyond the courtyard. From it, in silver uniforms, dropped the men of the Space Service. They waved up at Pace in the window and shouted words he couldn't hear.

"Well, they showed up after all," he said.

"You knew they'd come."

"Did I? To see me marry a Martian woman, a native? I didn't know anything."

"They're here now, quit worrying."

He stepped before the mirror and looked at himself. His blue uniform, a captain of the Space Service, with its solid silver buttons and glossy black boots and star medallion over the heart. He brushed some lint from his shoulder and said, "All right. I'm ready."

"I'll tell Elta."

There was to be a big explosion after the wedding. The rockets were going to fly over in patterns of seven, leaving pink rivers of fire, gold rivers of fire, scarlet rivers and blue-flame rivers that would melt down like a blazing ink through the interior of a clear glass of water, dispersing and coloring the night. Their faces, looking up, would be dyed golden and metal colors, their wan eyes would catch fire, and they would feel the unseasonable heat of the great silver ovens passing over.

And then Elta's people would come with their dances and their harps that had human voices and which could sing of weddings ten thousand years before this, and other instruments that were like winds in the trees, compounded of crystal and foil, would make the cadence to which her women would dance, with masks of blue bronze mesh over their faces, and little bells in their hands.

He rapped on her door.

"Elta, it's me."

The door rushed open and she was in his arms, very much afraid. "They aren't coming, they aren't coming." She began to cry and he didn't know what else to do but hold her and wait upon her. "We shouldn't have planned this, we shouldn't be married, nobody likes it, my people, your people, two different worlds, and we won't like it, later."

He tightened his hands about her. "To hell with them. I don't need anyone's permission. We talked this over."

"I know, I know." She lifted her face then and looked at him with her golden eyes, and the tears on her cheeks shook away. "I'll be all right. It's just that I don't think they'll come."

"I thought the same thing, but look—the rocket and the men. And there are your people now."

In the middle of the wedding, her people mist away. It was only an enchantment. They didn't approve.

In the middle of a party on Earth they find that all the guests, the host, the hostess, are robots!

She misses Mars.

He misses Earth.

He had been fishing in one of the clear cold streams of Mars, spending a quiet weekend by himself, the way he had always enjoyed it, with the sky and the land and the fishing rod and the whir of the reel, and the net in the hand to catch the odd things that were fish on Mars. And then he had looked up and this woman was there looking at him. Her eyes were like gold pieces, the kind his grandfather had given him when he was a boy, saved over from the days when gold had become illegal. He still had the gold pieces in his pocket, a secret between himself and the dead grandfather, a conspiracy against the government. And here was this woman's face with the gold coin eyes, and the pink straight, half-smiling mouth, and the straight carriage and the hair the color of copper thread, and the skin the color of white milk with just a shade of melted gold in it, too.

He stood with the fishing rod in his hand. "Hello," he said.

She had replied, "I am Martian. Elta."

"Hello, Elta."

"What are you doing?"

"Catching fish."

"How strange your way, when we can call and they will come."

He smiled

"You do not believe," she said.

"No, I do not believe."

"Well, then." And she called. And the fishes came.

And any day you buy your ticket and go on the silver rocket to Mars, halfway between green Earth and red Mars you'll find a little world swinging through the black night of space, a little world where half the hills are green hills and half the hills are red, and half the rivers are blue and half the rivers are like wine, and half the trees are elm trees and half the trees shed fire, and half the children have blue eyes and half the children have eyes like melted gold. And you'll see a house which is half American Modern and half Martian crystal, and out of it, at noon, come the sounds of an electric radio and a harp singing. And through the window you can see Mr. Samuel Pace and his wife Elta, laughing, as they watch their children chase through a distant Martian meadow which is sprinkled with Kansas sunflowers.

And you go on to Mars, leaving them there between.

The Visitor

Saul Williams awoke to the still morning. He looked wearily out of his tent and thought about how far away Earth was. Millions of miles, he thought. But then what could you do about it? Your lungs were full of the "blood rust." You coughed all the time.

Saul arose this particular morning at seven o'clock. He was a tall man, lean, thinned by his illness. It was a quiet morning on Mars, with the dead sea bottom—flat and silent—no wind on it. The sun was clear and cool in the empty sky. He washed his face and ate breakfast.

After that he wanted very much to be back on Earth. During the day he tried every way that it was possible to be in New York City. Sometimes, if he sat right and held his hands a certain way, he did it. He could almost smell New York. Most of the time, though, it was impossible.

Later in the morning Saul tried to die. He lay on the sand and told his heart to stop. It continued beating. He imagined himself leaping from a cliff or cutting his wrists, but laughed to himself—he knew he lacked the nerve for either act.

Maybe if I squeeze tight and think about it enough, just sleep and never wake, he thought. He tried it. An hour later he awoke with a mouth full of blood. He got up and spat it out and felt very sorry for himself. This blood rust—it filled your mouth and your nose; it ran from your ears, your fingernails; and it took a year to kill you. The only cure was shoving you in a rocket and shooting you out to exile on Mars. There was no known cure on Earth, and remaining there would contaminate and kill others. So here he was, bleeding all the time, and lonely.

Saul's eyes narrowed. In the distance, by an ancient city ruin, he saw another man lying on a filthy blanket. When Saul walked up, the man on the blanket stirred weakly.

"Hello, Saul," he said.

"Another morning," said Saul. "Christ, I'm lonely!"

"It is an affliction of the rusted ones," said the man on the blanket, not moving, very pale and as if he might vanish if you touched him.

"I wish to God," said Saul, looking down at the man, "that you could at least talk. Why is it that intellectuals never get the blood rust and come up here?"

"It is a conspiracy against you, Saul," said the man, shutting his eyes, too weary to keep them open. "Once I had the strength to be an intellectual. Now, it's a job to think."

"If only we could talk," said Saul Williams.

The other man merely shrugged indifferently.

"Come tomorrow. Perhaps I'll have enough strength to talk about Aristotle then. I'll try. Really I will." The man sank down under the worn tree. He opened one eye. "Remember, once we did talk on Aristotle, six months ago, on that good day I had."

"I remember," said Saul, not listening. He looked at the dead sea. "I wish I were as sick as you, then maybe I wouldn't worry about being an intellectual. Then maybe I'd get some peace."

"You'll get just as bad as I am now in about six months," said the dying man. "Then you won't care about anything but sleep and more sleep. Sleep will be like a woman to you. You'll always go back to her, because she's fresh and good and faithful and she always treats you kindly and the same. You only wake up so you can think about going back to sleep. It's a nice thought." The man's voice was a bare whisper. Now it stopped and a light breathing took over.

Saul walked off.

Along the shores of the dead sea, like so many emptied bottles flung up by some long-gone wave, were the huddled bodies of sleeping men. Saul could see them all down the curve of the empty sea. One, two, three—all of them sleeping alone, most of them worse off than he, each with his little cache of food, each grown into himself, because social converse was weakening and sleep was good.

At first there had been a few nights around mutual campfires. And they had all talked about Earth. That was the only thing they talked about. Earth and the way the waters ran in town creeks and what homemade strawberry pie tasted like and how New York looked in the early morning coming over on the Jersey ferry in the salt wind.

I want Earth, thought Saul. I want it so bad it hurts. I want something I can never have again. And they all want it and it hurts them not to have it. More than food or a woman or anything, I just want Earth. This sickness puts women away forever; they're not things to be wanted. But Earth, yes. That's a thing for the mind and not the weak body.

The bright metal flashed on the sky.

Saul looked up.

The bright metal flashed again.

A minute later the rocket landed on the sea bottom. A valve opened, a man stepped out, carrying his luggage with him. Two other men, in protective germicide suits, accompanied him, bringing out vast cases of food, setting up a tent for him.

Another minute and the rocket returned to the sky. The exile stood alone.

Saul began to run. He hadn't run in weeks, and it was very tiring, but he ran and yelled.

"Hello, hello!"

The young man looked Saul up and down when he arrived.

"Hello. So this is Mars. My name's Leonard Mark."

"I'm Saul Williams."

They shook hands. Leonard Mark was very young—only eighteen; very blond, pink-faced, blue-eyed and fresh in spite of his illness.

"How are things in New York?" said Saul.

"Like this," said Leonard Mark. And he looked at Saul.

New York grew up out of the desert, made of stone and filled with March winds. Neons exploded in electric color. Yellow taxis glided in a still night. Bridges rose and tugs chanted in the midnight harbors. Curtains rose on spangled musicals.

Saul put his hands to his head, violently.

"Hold on, hold on!" he cried. "What's happening to me? What's wrong with me? I'm going crazy!"

Leaves sprouted from trees in Central Park, green and new. On the pathway Saul strolled along, smelling the air.

"Stop it, stop it, you fool!" Saul shouted at himself. He pressed his forehead with his hands. "This can't be!"

"It is," said Leonard Mark.

The New York towers faded. Mars returned. Saul stood on the empty sea bottom, staring limply at the young newcomer.

"You," he said, putting his hand out to Leonard Mark. "You did it. You did it with your mind."

"Yes," said Leonard Mark.

Silently they stood facing each other. Finally, trembling, Saul seized the other exile's hand and wrung it again and again, saying, "Oh, but I'm glad you're here. You can't know how glad I am!"

They drank their rich brown coffee from the tin cups.

It was high noon. They had been talking all through the warm morning time.

"And this ability of yours?" said Saul over his cup, looking steadily at the young Leonard Mark.

"It's just something I was born with," said Mark, looking into his drink. "My mother was in the blowup of London back in '57. I was born ten months later. I don't know what you'd call my ability. Telepathy and thought transference, I suppose. I used to have an act, I traveled all around the world. Leonard Mark, the mental marvel, they said on the billboards. I was pretty well off. Most people thought I was a charlatan. You know what people think of theatrical folks. Only I knew I was really genuine, but I didn't let anybody know. It was safer not to let it get around too much. Oh, a few of my close friends knew about my *real* ability. I had a lot of talents that will come in handy now that I'm here on Mars."

"You sure scared the hell out of me," said Saul, his cup rigid in his hand. "When New York came right up out of the ground that way, I thought I was insane."

"It's a form of hypnotism which affects all of the sensual organs at once—eyes, ears, nose, mouth, skin—all of them. What would you like to be doing now most of all?"

Saul put down his cup. He tried to hold his hands very steady. He wet his lips. "I'd like to be in a little creek I used to swim in in Mellin Town, Illinois, when I was a kid. I'd like to be stark-naked and swimming."

"Well," said Leonard Mark and moved his head ever so little.

Saul fell back on the sand, his eyes shut.

Leonard Mark sat watching him.

Saul lay on the sand. From time to time his hands moved, twitched excitedly. His mouth spasmed open; sounds issued from his tightening and relaxing throat.

Saul began to make slow movements of his arms, out and back, out and back, gasping with his head to one side, his arms going and coming slowly on the warm air, stirring the yellow sand under him, his body turning slowly over.

Leonard Mark quietly finished his coffee. While he drank he kept his eyes on the moving, whispering Saul lying there on the dead sea bottom.

"All right," said Leonard Mark.

Saul sat up, rubbing his face.

After a moment he told Leonard Mark, "I saw the creek. I ran along the bank and I took off my clothes," he said breathlessly, his smile incredulous. "And I *dived in* and swam around!"

"I'm pleased," said Leonard Mark.

"Here!" Saul reached into his pocket and drew forth his last bar of chocolate. "This is for you."

"What's this?" Leonard Mark looked at the gift. "Chocolate? Nonsense, I'm not doing this for pay. I'm doing it because it makes you happy. Put that thing back in your pocket before I turn it into a rattlesnake and it bites you."

"Thank you, thank you!" Saul put it away. "You don't know how good that water was." He fetched the coffeepot. "More?"

Pouring the coffee, Saul shut his eyes a moment.

I've got Socrates here, he thought; Socrates and Plato, and Nietzsche and Schopenhauer. This man, by his talk, is a genius. By his talent, he's incredible! Think of the long, easy days and the cool nights of talk we'll have. It won't be a bad year at all. Not half.

He spilled the coffee.

"What's wrong?"

"Nothing." Saul himself was confused, startled.

We'll be in Greece, he thought. In Athens. We'll be in Rome, if we want, when we study the Roman writers. We'll stand in the Parthenon and the Acropolis. It won't be just talk, but it'll be a place to be, besides. This man can do it. He has the power to do it. When we talk the plays of Racine, he can make a stage and players and all of it for me. By Christ, this is better than life ever was! How much better to be sick and here than well on Earth without these abilities! How many people have ever seen a Greek drama played in a Greek amphitheater in the year 31 B.C.?

And if I ask, quietly and earnestly, will this man take on the aspect of Schopenhauer and Darwin and Bergson and all the other thoughtful men of the ages...? Yes, why not? To sit and talk with Nietzsche in person, with Plato himself...!

There was only one thing wrong. Saul felt himself swaying.

The other men. The other sick ones along the bottom of this dead sea.

In the distance men were moving, walking toward them. They had seen the rocket flash, land, dislodge a passenger. Now they were coming, slowly, painfully, to greet the new arrival.

Saul was cold. "Look," he said. "Mark, I think we'd better head for the mountains."

"Why?"

"See those men coming? Some of them are insane."

"Really?"

"Yes."

"Isolation and all make them that way?"

"Yes, that's it. We'd better get going."

"They don't look very dangerous. They move slowly."

"You'd be surprised."

Mark looked at Saul. "You're trembling. Why's that?"

"There's no time to talk," said Saul, getting up swiftly. "Come on. Don't you realize what'll happen once they discover your talent? They'll fight over you. They'll kill each other—kill you—for the right to own you."

"Oh, but I don't belong to anybody," said Leonard Mark. He looked at Saul. "No. Not even you."

Saul jerked his head. "I didn't even think of that."

"Didn't you now?" Mark laughed.

"We haven't time to argue," answered Saul, eyes blinking, cheeks blazing. "Come on!"

"I don't want to. I'm going to sit right here until those men show up. You're a little too possessive. My life's my own."

Saul felt ugliness in himself. His face began to twist. "You *heard* what I said."

"How very quickly you changed from a friend into an enemy," observed Mark.

Saul hit at him. It was a neat quick blow, coming down.

Mark ducked aside, laughing. "No, you don't!"

They were in the center of Times Square: Cars roared, hooting, upon them. Buildings plunged up, hot, into the blue air.

"It's a lie!" cried Saul, staggering under the visual impact. "For God's sake, don't, Mark! The men are coming. You'll be killed!"

Mark sat there on the pavement, laughing at his joke. "Let them come. I can fool them all!"

New York distracted Saul. It was meant to distract—meant to keep his attention with its unholy beauty, after so many months away from it. Instead of attacking Mark he could only stand, drinking in the alien but familiar scene.

He shut his eyes. "No." And fell forward, dragging Mark with him. Horns screamed in his ears. Brakes hissed and caught violently. He smashed at Mark's chin.

Silence.

Mark lay on the sea bottom.

Taking the unconscious man in his arms, Saul began to run heavily.

New York was gone. There was only the wide soundlessness of the dead sea. The men were closing in around him. He headed for the hills with his precious cargo, with

New York and green country and fresh springs and old friends held in his arms. He fell once and struggled up. He did not stop running.

Night filled the cave. The wind wandered in and out, tugging at the small fire, scattering ashes.

Mark opened his eyes. He was tied with ropes and leaning against the dry wall of the cave, facing the fire.

Saul put another stick on the fire, glancing now and again with a catlike nervousness at the cave entrance.

"You're a fool."

Saul started.

"Yes," said Mark, "you're a fool. They'll find us. If they have to hunt for six months they'll find us. They saw New York, at a distance, like a mirage. And us in the center of it. It's too much to think they won't be curious and follow our trail."

"I'll move on with you then," said Saul, staring into the fire.

"And they'll come after."

"Shut up!"

Mark smiled. "Is that the way to speak to your wife?"

"You heard me!"

"Oh, a fine marriage this is—your greed and my mental ability. What do you want to see now? Shall I show you a few more of your childhood scenes?"

Saul felt the sweat coming out on his brow. He didn't know if the man was joking or not. "Yes," he said.

"All right," said Mark, "watch!"

Flame gushed out of the rocks. Sulphur choked him. Pits of brimstone exploded, concussions rocked the cave. Heaving up, Saul coughed and blundered, burned, withered by hell!

Hell went away. The cave returned.

Mark was laughing.

Saul stood over him. "You," he said coldly, bending down.

"What else do you expect?" cried Mark. "To be tied up, toted off, made the intellectual bride of a man insane with loneliness—do you think I enjoy this?"

"I'll untie you if you promise not to run away."

"I couldn't promise that. I'm a free agent. I don't belong to anybody."

Saul got down on his knees. "But you've *got* to belong, do you hear? You've *got* to belong. I can't let you go away!"

"My dear fellow, the more you say things like that, the more remote I am. If you'd had any sense and done things intelligently, we'd have been friends. I'd have been glad to do you these little hypnotic favors. After all, they're no trouble for me to conjure up. Fun, really. But you've botched it. You wanted me all to yourself. You were afraid the others would take me away from you. Oh, how mistaken you were. I have enough power to keep them all happy. You could have shared me, like a community kitchen. I'd have felt quite like a god among children, being kind, doing favors, in return for which you might bring me little gifts, special tidbits of food."

"I'm sorry, I'm sorry!" Saul cried. "But I know those men too well."

"Are you any different? Hardly! Go out and see if they're coming. I thought I heard a noise."

Saul ran. In the cave entrance he cupped his hands, peering down into the night-filled gully. Dim shapes stirred. Was it only the wind blowing the roving clumps of weeds? He began to tremble a fine, aching tremble.

"I don't see anything." He came back into an empty cave.

He stared at the fireplace. "Mark!"

Mark was gone.

There was nothing but the cave, filled with boulders, stones, pebbles, the lonely fire flickering, the wind sighing. And Saul standing there, incredulous and numb.

"Mark! Mark! Come back!"

The man had worked free of his bonds, slowly, carefully, and using the ruse of imagining he heard other men approaching, had gone—where?

The cave was deep, but ended in a blank wall. And Mark could not have slipped past him into the night. How then?

Saul stepped around the fire. He drew his knife and approached a large boulder that stood against the cave wall. Smiling, he pressed the knife against the boulder. Smiling, he tapped the knife there. Then he drew his knife back to plunge it into the boulder.

"Stop!" shouted Mark.

The boulder vanished. Mark was there.

Saul suspended his knife. The fire played on his cheeks. His eyes were quite insane.

"It didn't work," he whispered. He reached down and put his hands on Mark's throat and closed his fingers. Mark said nothing, but moved uneasily in the grip, his eyes ironic, telling things to Saul that Saul knew.

If you kill me, the eyes said, where will all your dreams be? If you kill me, where will all the streams and brook trout be? Kill me, kill Plato, kill Aristotle, kill Einstein; yes, kill all of us! Go ahead, strangle me. I dare you.

Saul's fingers released the throat.

Shadows moved into the cave mouth.

Both men turned their heads.

The other men were there. Five of them, haggard with travel, panting, waiting in the outer rim of light.

"Good evening," called Mark, laughing. "Come in, come in, gentlemen!"

By dawn the arguments and ferocities still continued. Mark sat among the glaring men, rubbing his wrists, newly released from his bonds. He created a mahogany-paneled conference hall and a marble table at which they all sat, ridiculously bearded, evil-smelling, sweating and greedy men, eyes bent upon their treasure.

"The way to settle it," said Mark at last, "is for each of you to have certain hours of certain days for appointments with me. I'll treat you all equally. I'll be city property, free to come and go. That's fair enough. As for Saul here, he's on probation. When

he's proved he can be a civil person once more, I'll give him a treatment or two. Until that time, I'll have nothing more to do with him."

The other exiles grinned at Saul.

"I'm sorry," Saul said. "I didn't know what I was doing. I'm all right now."

"We'll see," said Mark. "Let's give ourselves a month, shall we?"

The other men grinned at Saul.

Saul said nothing. He sat staring at the floor of the cave.

"Let's see now," said Mark. "On Mondays it's your day, Smith."

Smith nodded.

"On Tuesdays I'll take Peter there, for an hour or so."

Peter nodded.

"On Wednesdays I'll finish up with Johnson, Holtzman, and Jim, here."

The last three men looked at each other.

"The rest of the week I'm to be left strictly alone, do you hear?" Mark told them. "A little should be better than nothing. If you don't obey, I won't perform at all."

"Maybe we'll *make* you perform," said Johnson. He caught the other men's eye. "Look, we're five against his one. We can make him do anything we want. If we cooperate, we've got a great thing here."

"Don't be idiots," Mark warned the other men.

"Let me talk," said Johnson. "He's telling us what he'll do. Why don't we tell *him*! Are we bigger than him, or not? And him threatening not to perform! Well, just let me get a sliver of wood under his toenails and maybe burn his fingers a bit with a steel file, and we'll see if he performs! Why shouldn't we have performances, I want to know, every night in the week?"

"Don't listen to him!" said Mark. "He's crazy. He can't be depended on. You know what he'll do, don't you? He'll get you all off guard, one by one, and kill you; yes, kill all of you, so that when he's done, he'll be alone—just him and me! That's his sort."

The listening men blinked. First at Mark, then at Johnson.

"For that matter," observed Mark, "none of you can trust the others. This is a fool's conference. The minute your back is turned one of the other men will murder you. I dare say, at the week's end, you'll all be dead or dying."

A cold wind blew into the mahogany room. It began to dissolve and became a cave once more. Mark was tired of his joke. The marble table splashed and rained and evaporated.

The men gazed suspiciously at each other with little bright animal eyes. What was spoken was true. They saw each other in the days to come, surprising one another, killing—until that last lucky one remained to enjoy the intellectual treasure that walked among them.

Saul watched them and felt alone and disquieted. Once you have made a mistake, how hard to admit your wrongness, to go back, start fresh. They were *all* wrong. They had been lost a long time. Now they were worse than lost.

"And to make matters very bad," said Mark at last, "one of you has a gun. All the rest of you have only knives. But one of you, I know, has a gun."

Everybody jumped up. "Search!" said Mark. "Find the one with the gun or you're all dead!"

That did it. The men plunged wildly about, not knowing whom to search first. Their hands grappled, they cried out, and Mark watched them in contempt.

Johnson fell back, feeling in his jacket. "All right," he said. "We might as well have it over now! Here, you, Smith."

And he shot Smith through the chest. Smith fell. The other men yelled. They broke apart. Johnson aimed and fired twice more.

"Stop!" cried Mark.

New York soared up around them, out of rock and cave and sky. Sun glinted on high towers. The elevated thundered; tugs blew in the harbor. The green lady stared across the bay, a torch in her hand.

"Look, you fools!" said Mark. Central Park broke out constellations of spring blossoms. The wind blew fresh-cut lawn smells over them in a wave.

And in the center of New York, bewildered, the men stumbled. Johnson fired his gun three times more. Saul ran forward. He crashed against Johnson, bore him down, wrenched the gun away. It fired again.

The men stopped milling.

They stood. Saul lay across Johnson. They ceased struggling.

There was a terrible silence. The men stood watching. New York sank down into the sea. With a hissing, bubbling, sighing; with a cry of mined metal and old time, the great structures leaned, warped, flowed, collapsed.

Mark stood among the buildings. Then, like a building, a neat red hole drilled into his chest, wordless, he fell.

Saul lay staring at the men, at the body.

He got up, the gun in his hand.

Johnson did not move—was afraid to move.

They all shut their eyes and opened them again, thinking that by so doing they might reanimate the man who lay before them.

The cave was cold.

Saul stood up and looked, remotely, at the gun in his hand. He took it and threw it far out over the valley and did not watch it fall.

They looked down at the body as if they could not believe it. Saul bent down and took hold of the limp hand. "Leonard!" he said softly. "Leonard?" He shook the hand. "Leonard!"

Leonard Mark did not move. His eyes were shut; his chest had ceased going up and down. He was getting cold.

Saul got up. "We've killed him," he said, not looking at the men. His mouth was filling with a raw liquor now. "The only one we didn't want to kill, we killed." He put his shaking hand to his eyes. The other men stood waiting.

"Get a spade," said Saul. "Bury him." He turned away. "I'll have nothing to do with you."

Somebody walked off to find a spade.

Saul was so weak he couldn't move. His legs were grown into the earth, with roots feeding deep of loneliness and fear and the cold of the night. The fire had almost died out and now there was only the double moonlight riding over the blue mountains.

There was the sound of someone digging in the earth with a spade.

"We don't need him anyhow," said somebody, much too loudly.

The sound of digging went on. Saul walked off slowly and let himself slide down the side of a dark tree until he reached and was sitting blankly on the sand, his hands blindly in his lap.

Sleep, he thought. We'll all go to sleep now. We have that much, anyway. Go to sleep and try to dream of New York and all the rest.

He closed his eyes wearily, the blood gathering in his nose and his mouth and in his quivering eyes.

"How did he do it?" he asked in a tired voice. His head fell forward on his chest. "How did he bring New York up here and make us walk around in it? Let's try. It shouldn't be too hard. Think! Think of New York," he whispered, falling down into sleep. "New York and Central Park and then Illinois in the spring, apple blossoms and green grass."

It didn't work. It wasn't the same. New York was gone and nothing he could do would bring it back. He would rise every morning and walk on the dead sea looking for it, and walk forever around Mars, looking for it, and never find it. And finally lie, too tired to walk, trying to find New York in his head, but not finding it.

The last thing he heard before he slept was the spade rising and falling and digging a hole into which, with a tremendous crash of metal and golden mist and odor and color and sound, New York collapsed, fell, and was buried.

He cried all night in his sleep.

The Lost City of Mars

The great eye floated in space. And behind the great eye somewhere hidden away within metal and machinery was a small eye that belonged to a man who looked and could not stop looking at all the multitudes of stars and the diminishings and growings of light a billion billion miles away.

The small eye closed with tiredness. Captain John Wilder stood holding to the telescopic devices which probed the universe and at last murmured, "Which one?"

The astronomer with him said, "Take your pick."

"I wish it were that easy." Wilder opened his eyes. "What's the data on this star?"

"Alpha-Cygne II. Same size and reading as our sun. Planetary system, possible."

"Possible. Not certain. If we pick the wrong star, God help the people we send on a two-hundred-year journey to find a planet that may not be there. No, God help me, for the final selection is mine, and I may well send myself on that journey. So, how can we be sure?"

"We can't. We just make the best guess, send our starship out, and pray."

"You are not very encouraging. That's it. I'm tired."

Wilder touched a switch that shut up tight the greater eye, this rocket-powered space lens that stared cold upon the abyss, saw far too much and knew little, and now knew nothing. The rocket laboratory drifted sightless on an endless night.

"Home," said the captain. "Let's go home." And the blind beggar-after-stars wheeled on a spread of fire and ran away.

The frontier cities on Mars looked very fine from above. Coming down for a landing, Wilder saw the neons among the blue hills and thought, We'll light those worlds a billion miles off, and the children of the people living under those lights this instant, we'll make them immortal. Very simply, if we succeed, they will live forever.

Live forever. The rocket landed. Live forever.

The wind that blew from the frontier town smelled of grease. An aluminum-toothed jukebox banged somewhere. A junkyard rusted beside the rocket port. Old newspapers danced alone on the windy tarmac.

Wilder, motionless at the top of the gantry elevator, suddenly wished not to move down. The lights suddenly had become people and not words that, huge in the mind, could be handled with elaborate ease.

He sighed. The freight of people was too heavy. The stars were too far away.

"Captain?" said someone behind him.

He stepped forward. The elevator gave way. They sank with a silent screaming toward a very real land with real people in it, who were waiting for him to choose.

At midnight the telegram-bin hissed and exploded out a message projectile. Wilder, at his desk, surrounded by tapes and computation cards, did not touch it for a long while. When at last he pulled the message out, he scanned it, rolled it in a tight ball, then uncrumpled the message and read again:

> FINAL CANAL BEING FILLED TOMORROW WEEK. YOU ARE INVITED CANAL YACHT PARTY. DISTINGUISHED GUESTS. FOUR-DAY JOURNEY TO SEARCH FOR LOST CITY. KINDLY ACKNOWLEDGE.
>
> I. V. AARONSON.

Wilder blinked, and laughed quietly. He crumpled the paper again, but stopped, lifted the telephone and said: "Telegram to I. V. Aaronson, Mars City I. Answer affirmative. No sane reason why, but still—affirmative."

And hung up the phone. To sit for a long while watching this night which shadowed all the whispering, ticking, and motioning machines.

The dry canal waited.

It had been waiting twenty thousand years for nothing but dust to filter through in ghost tides. Now, quite suddenly, it whispered. And the whisper became a rush and wall-caroming glide of waters.

As if a vast machined fist had struck the rocks somewhere, clapped the air and cried "Miracle!," a wall of water came proud and high along the channels, and lay down in all the dry places of the canal and moved on toward ancient deserts of dry-bone, surprising old wharves and lifting up the skeletons of boats abandoned thirty centuries before when the water burnt away to nothing.

The tide turned a corner and lifted up—a boat as fresh as the morning itself, with new-minted silver screws and brass pipings, and bright new Earth-sewn flags. The boat, suspended from the side of the canal, bore the name *Aaronson I.*

Inside the boat, a man with the same name smiled. Mr. Aaronson sat listening to the waters live under the boat.

And the sound of the water was cut across by the sound of a hovercraft, arriving, and a motorbike, arriving, and in the air, as if summoned with magical timing, drawn by the glimmer of tides in the old canal, a number of gadfly people flew over the hills on jet-pack machines, and hung suspended as if doubting this collision of lives caused by one rich man.

Scowling up with a smile, the rich man called to his children, cried them in from the heat with offers of food and drink.

"Captain Wilder! Mr. Parkhill! Mr. Beaumont!"

Wilder set his hovercraft down.

Sam Parkhill discarded his motorbike, for he had seen the yacht and it was a new love.

"My God," cried Beaumont, the actor, part of the frieze of people in the sky dancing like bright bees on the wind. "I've timed my entrance wrong. I'm early. There's no audience!"

"I'll applaud you down!" shouted the old man, and did so, then added, "Mr. Aikens!"

"Aikens?" said Parkhill. "The big-game hunter?"

"None other!"

And Aikens dived down as if to seize them in his harrying claws. He fancied his resemblance to the hawk. He was finished and stropped like a razor by the swift life he had lived. Not an edge of him but cut the air as he fell, a strange plummeting vengeance upon people who had done nothing to him. In the moment before destruction, he pulled up on his jets and, gently screaming, simmered himself to touch the marble jetty. About his lean middle hung a rifle belt. His pockets bulged like those of a boy from the candy store. One guessed he was stashed with sweet bullets and rare bombs. In his hands, like an evil child, he held a weapon that looked like a bolt of lightning fallen straight from the clutch of Zeus, stamped nevertheless: *Made in U.S.A.* His face was sunblasted dark. His eyes were cool surprises in the sunwrinkled flesh, all mint-blue-green crystal. He wore a white porcelain smile set in African sinews. The earth did not quite tremble as he landed.

"The lion prowls the land of Judah!" cried a voice from the heavens. "Now do behold the lambs driven forth to slaughter!"

"Oh for God's sake, Harry, shut up!" said a woman's voice.

And two more kites fluttered their souls, their dread humanity on the wind.

The rich man jubilated.

"Harry Harpwell!"

"Behold the angel of the Lord who comes with Annunciations!" the man in the sky said, hovering. "And the Annunciation is—" "He's drunk again," his wife supplied, flying ahead of him, not looking back.

"Megan Harpwell," said the rich man, like an entrepreneur introducing his troupe.

"The poet," said Wilder.

"And the poet's barracuda wife," muttered Parkhill.

"I am not drunk," the poet shouted down the wind. "I am simply *high*."

And here he let loose such a deluge of laughter that those below almost raised their hands to ward off the avalanche.

Lowering himself, like a fat dragon kite, the poet, whose wife's mouth was now clamped shut, bumbled over the yacht. He made the motions of blessing same, and winked at Wilder and Parkhill.

"Harpwell," he called. "Isn't that a name to go with being a great modern poet who suffers in the present, lives in the past, steals bones from old dramatists' tombs, and flies on this new egg-beater wind-suck device, to call down sonnets on your head? I pity the old euphoric saints and angels who had no invisible wings like this so as to

dart in oriole convolutions and ecstatic convulsions on the air as they sang their lines or damned souls to Hell. Poor earthbound sparrows, wings clipped. Only their genius flew. Only their Muse knew air-sickness—"

"Harry," said his wife, her feet on the ground, eyes shut.

"Hunter!" called the poet. "Aikens! Here's the greatest game in all the world, a poet on the wing. I bare my breast. Let fly your honeyed bee sting! Bring me, Icarus, down, if your gun be sunbeams kindled in one tube and let free in a single forest fire that escalates the sky and turns tallow, mush, candlewick and lyre to mere tarbaby. Ready, aim, fire!"

The hunter, in good humor, raised his gun.

The poet, at this, laughed a mightier laugh and, literally, exposed his chest by tearing aside his shirt.

At which moment a quietness came along the canal rim.

A woman appeared walking. Her maid walked behind her. There was no vehicle in sight, and it seemed almost as if they had wandered a long way out of the Martian hills and now stopped.

The very quietness of her entrance gave dignity and attention to Cara Corelli.

The poet shut up his lyric in the sky and landed.

The company all looked together at this actress who gazed back without seeing them. She was dressed in a black jumpsuit which was the same color as her dark hair. She walked like a woman who has spoken little in her life and now stood facing them with the same quietness, as if waiting for someone to move without being ordered. The wind blew her hair out and down over her shoulders. The paleness of her face was shocking. Her paleness, rather than her eyes, stared at them.

Then, without a word, she stepped down into the yacht and sat in the front of the craft, like a figurehead that knows its place and goes there.

The moment of silence was over.

Aaronson ran his finger down his printed guest list.

"An actor, a beautiful woman who happens to be an actress, a hunter, a poet, a poet's wife, a rocket captain, a former technician. All aboard!"

On the afterdeck of the huge craft, Aaronson spread forth his maps.

"Ladies, gentlemen," he said. "This is more than a four-day drinking bout, party, excursion. This is a Search!"

He waited for their faces to light, properly, and for them to glance from his eyes to the charts, and then said:

"We are seeking the fabled lost City of Mars, once called Dia-Sao. The City of Doom, it was called. Something terrible about it. The inhabitants fled as from a plague. The City left empty. Still empty now, centuries later."

"We," said Captain Wilder, "have charted, mapped, and cross-indexed every acre of land on Mars in the last fifteen years. You can't mislay a city the size of the one you speak of."

"True," said Aaronson, "you've mapped it from the sky, from the land. But you have *not* charted it via water! For the canals have been empty until now! So now we shall take the new waters that fill this last canal and go where the boats once went

in the olden days, and see the very last new things that need to be seen on Mars." The rich man continued: "And somewhere on our traveling, as sure as the breath in our mouths, we shall find the most beautiful, the most fantastic, the most awful city in the history of this old world. And walk in that city—who knows?—find the reason why the Martians ran screaming away from it, as the legend says, ten thousand years ago."

Silence. Then:

"Bravo! Well done." The poet shook the old man's hand.

"And in that city," said Aikens, the hunter, "mightn't there be weapons the like of which we've never seen?"

"Most likely, sir."

"Well." The hunter cradled his bolt of lightning. "I was bored of Earth, shot every animal, ran fresh out of beasts, and came here looking for newer, better, more dangerous maneaters of any size or shape. Plus, now, new weapons! What more can one ask? Fine!"

And he dropped his blue-silver lightning bolt over the side. It sank in the clear water, bubbling.

"Let's get the hell out of here."

"Let us, indeed," said Aaronson, "get the good hell out."

And he pressed the button that launched the yacht.

And the water flowed the yacht away.

And the yacht went in the direction toward which Cara Corelli's quiet paleness was pointed: beyond.

As the poet opened the first champagne bottle, the cork banged. Only the hunter did not jump.

The yacht sailed steadily through the day into night. They found an ancient ruin and had dinner there and a good wine imported, one hundred million miles from Earth. It was noted that it had traveled well.

With the wine came the poet, and after quite a bit of the poet, came sleep on board the yacht which moved away in search of a City that would not as yet be found.

At three in the morning, restless, unaccustomed to the gravity of a planet pulling at all of his body and not freeing him to dream, Wilder came out on the afterdeck of the yacht and found the actress there.

She was watching the waters slip by in dark revelations and discardments of stars.

He sat beside her and thought a question.

Just as silently, Cara Corelli asked herself the same question, and answered it.

"I am here on Mars because not long ago for the first time in my life, a man told me the truth."

Perhaps she expected surprise. Wilder said nothing. The boat moved as on a stream of soundless oil.

"I am a beautiful woman. I have been beautiful all of my life. Which means that from the start people lied because they simply wished to be with me. I grew up surrounded by the untruths of men, women, and children who could not risk my displeasure. When beauty pouts, the world trembles.

"Have you ever seen a beautiful woman surrounded by men, seen them nodding, nodding? Heard their laughter? Men will laugh at anything a beautiful woman says. Hate themselves, yes, but they will laugh, say no for yes and yes for no.

"Well, that's how it was every day of every year for me. A crowd of liars stood between me and anything unpleasant. Their words dressed me in silks.

"But quite suddenly, oh, no more than six weeks ago, this man told me a truth. It was a small thing. I don't remember now what it was he said. But he didn't laugh. He didn't even smile.

"And no sooner was it out and over, the words spoken, that I knew a terrible thing had happened.

"I was growing old."

The yacht rocked gently on the tide.

"Oh, there would be more men who would, lying, smile again at what I said. But I saw the years ahead, when Beauty could no longer stomp its small foot, and shake down earthquakes, make cowardice a custom among otherwise good men.

"The man? He took back his truth immediately, when he saw that he had shocked me. But it was too late. I bought a one-way fare to Mars. Aaronson's invitation, when I arrived, put me on this new journey that will end...who knows where."

Wilder found that during this last he had reached out and taken her hand.

"No," she said, withdrawing. "No word. No touch. No pity. No self-pity." She smiled for the first time. "Isn't it strange? I always thought, wouldn't it be nice, someday, to hear the truth, to give up the masquerade? How wrong I was. It's no fun at all."

She sat and watched the black waters pour by the boat. When she thought to look again, some hours later, the seat beside her was empty. Wilder was gone.

On the second day, letting the new waters take them where they wished to go, they sailed toward a high range of mountains and lunched, on the way, in an old shrine, and had dinner that night in a further ruin. The Lost City was not much talked about. They were sure it would never be found.

But on the third day, without anyone's saying, they felt the approach of a great Presence.

It was the poet who finally put it in words.

"Is God humming under His breath somewhere?"

"What a fierce scum you are," said his wife. "Can't you speak plain English even when you gossip?"

"Dammit, listen!" cried the poet.

So they listened.

"Don't you feel as if you stood on the threshold of a giant blast-furnace kitchen and inside somewhere, all comfortably warm, vast hands, flour-gloved, smelling of wondrous tripes and miraculous viscera, bloodied and proud of the blood, somewhere God cooks out the dinnertime of Life? In that cauldron sun, a brew to make the flowering forth of life on Venus, in that vat a stew broth of bones and nervous heart to run in animals on planets ten billion light-years gone. And isn't God content at His fabulous workings in the great kitchen Universe, where He has menu'd out a history of feasts, famines, deaths and reburgeonings for a billion billion years? And if God be content, would He not hum under His breath? Feel your bones. Aren't the marrows teeming with that hum? For that matter, God not only hums, He sings in the elements. He dances in molecules. Eternal celebration swarms us. Something is Near. Sh."

He pressed his fat finger to his pouting lips.

And now all were silent, and Cara Corelli's paleness search-lighted the darkening waters ahead.

They all felt it. Wilder did. Parkhill did. They smoked to cover it. They put the smokes out. They waited in the dusk.

And the humming grew nearer. And the hunter, smelling it, went to join the silent actress at the bow of the yacht. And the poet sat to write out the words he had spoken.

"Yes," he said, as the stars came out. "It's almost upon us. It has." He took a breath. "Arrived."

The yacht passed into a tunnel.

The tunnel went under a mountain.

And the City was there.

It was a city within a hollow mountain with its own meadows surrounding it and its own strangely colored and illumined stone sky above it. And it had been lost and remained lost for the simple reason that people had tried flying to discover it or had unraveled roads to find it, when all the while the canals which led to it stood waiting for simple walkers to tread where once waters had tread.

And now the yacht filled with strange people from another planet touched an ancient wharf.

And the City stirred.

In the old days, cities were alive or dead if there were or were not people in them. It was that simple. But in the later days of life on Earth or Mars, cities did not die. They slept. And in their dreamful coggeries and enwheeled slumbers they remembered how once it was or how it might be again.

So as, one by one, the party filed out on the dock, they felt a great personage, the hidden, oiled, the metaled and shining soul of the metropolis slide in a landfall of muted and hidden fireworks toward becoming fully awake.

The weight of the new people on the dock caused a machined exhalation. They felt themselves on a delicate scale. The dock sank a millionth of an inch.

And the City, the cumbrous Sleeping Beauty of a nightmare device, sensed this touch, this kiss, and slept no more.

Thunder.

In a wall a hundred feet high stood a gate seventy feet wide. This gate, in two parts, now rumbled back, to hide within the wall.

Aaronson stepped forward.

Wilder moved to intercept him. Aaronson sighed.

"Captain, no advice, please. No warnings. No patrols going on ahead to flush out villains. The City wants us in. It welcomes us. Surely you don't imagine anything's *alive* in there? It's a robot place. And don't look as if you think it's a time bomb. It hasn't seen fun and games in—what?—twenty centuries? Do you read Martian hieroglyphs? That cornerstone. The City was built at least nineteen hundred years ago."

"And abandoned," said Wilder.

"You make it sound like a plague drove them—"

"Not a plague." Wilder stirred uneasily, feeling himself weighed on the great scale sunk beneath his feet. "Something. Something..."

"Let's find out! In, all of you!"

Singly, and in pairs, the people from Earth stepped over the threshold.

Wilder, last of all, stepped across.

And the City came more alive.

The metal roofs of the City sprang wide like the petals of a flower.

Windows flicked wide like the lids of vast eyes to stare down upon them.

A river of sidewalks gently purled and washed at their feet, machined creekways which gleamed off through the City.

Aaronson gazed at the metal tides with pleasure. "Well, by God, the burden's off me! I was going to picnic you all. But that's the City's business now. Meet back here in two hours to compare notes! Here goes."

And saying this he leapt out on the scurrying silver carpet that treaded him swiftly away.

Wilder, alarmed, moved to follow. But Aaronson cried jovially back:

"Come on in, the water's fine!"

And the metal river whisked him, waving, off.

And one by one they stepped forward and the moving sidewalk drifted them away. Parkhill, the hunter, the poet and his wife, the actor, and then the beautiful woman and her maid. They floated like statues mysteriously borne on volcanic fluids that swept them anywhere, or nowhere, they could only guess.

Wilder jumped. The river seized his boots gently. Following, he went away into the avenues and around the bends of parks and through fiords of buildings.

And behind them, the dock and the gate stood empty. There was no trace to show they had arrived. It was almost as if they had never been.

Beaumont, the actor, was the first to leave the traveling pathway. A certain building caught his eye. And the next thing he knew, he had leapt off and edged near, sniffing.

He smiled.

For now he knew what kind of building he stood before because of the odor that drifted from it.

"Brass polish. And, by God, that means only one thing!"

Theater.

Brass doors, brass rails, brass rings on velvet curtains.

He opened the door of the building and stepped in. He sniffed and laughed aloud. Yes. Without a sign or a light, the smell alone, the special chemistry of metals and dust torn free of a million tickets.

And above all...he listened. The silence.

"The silence that waits. No other silence in the world waits. Only in a theater will you find that. The very particles of air chafe themselves in readiness. The shadows sit back and hold their breath. Well...ready or not...here I come..."

The lobby was green velvet undersea.

The theater itself: red velvet undersea, only dimly perceived as he opened the double doors. Somewhere beyond was a stage.

Something shuddered like a great beast. His breath had dreamt it alive. The air from his half-opened mouth caused the curtains one hundred feet away to softly furl and unfurl in darkness like all-covering wings.

Hesitantly, he took a step.

A light began to appear everywhere in a high ceiling where a school of miraculous prism fish swam upon themselves.

The oceanarium light played everywhere. He gasped.

The theater was full of people.

A thousand people sat motionless in the false dusk. True, they were small, fragile, rather dark, they wore silver masks, yet—people!

He knew, without asking, they had sat here for ten thousand years.

Yet they were not dead.

They were—he reached out a hand. He tapped the wrist of a man seated on the aisle.

The hand tinkled quietly.

He touched the shoulder of a woman. She chimed. Like a bell.

Yes, they had waited a few thousand years. But then, machines have a property of waiting.

He took a further step and froze.

For a sigh had passed over the crowd.

It was like the sound, the first small sound a newborn babe must make in the moment before it really sucks, bleats and shocks out its wailing surprise at being alive.

A thousand such sighs faded in the velvet portieres.

Beneath the masks, hadn't a thousand mouths drifted ajar?

Two moved. He stopped.

Two thousand eyes blinked wide in the velvet dusk.

He moved again.

A thousand silent heads wheeled on their ancient but well-oiled cogs.

They looked at him.

An unquenchable cold ran wild in him.

He turned to run.

But their eyes would not let him go.

And, from the orchestra pit: music.

He looked and saw, slowly rising, an insect agglomeration of instruments, all strange, all grotesquely acrobatic in their configurations. These were being softly thrummed, piped, touched, and massaged in tune.

The audience, with a motion, turned their gaze to the stage.

A light flashed on. The orchestra struck a grand fanfare chord.

The red curtains parted. A spotlight fixed itself to front center, blazing upon an empty dais where sat an empty chair.

Beaumont waited.

No actor appeared.

A stir. Several hands were lifted to left and right. The hands came together. They beat softly in applause.

Now the spotlight wandered off the stage, and up the aisle. The heads of the audience turned to follow the empty ghost of light. The masks glinted softly. The eyes behind the masks beckoned with warm color.

Beaumont stepped back.

But the light came steadily. It painted the floor with a blunt cone of pure whiteness.

And stopped, nibbling, at his feet.

The audience, turned, applauded even louder now. The theater banged, roared, ricocheted with their ceaseless tide of approbation.

Everything dissolved within him, from cold to warm. He felt as if he had been thrust raw into a downpour of summer rain. The storm rinsed him with gratitude. His heart jumped in great compulsive beats. His fists let go of themselves. His skeleton relaxed. He waited a moment longer, with the rain drenching over his upthrust and thankful cheeks and hammering his hungry eyelids so they fluttered to lock against themselves, and then he felt himself, like a ghost on battlements, led by a ghost light, lean, step, drift, move, down and along the incline, sliding to beautiful ruin, now no longer walking but striding, not striding but in full-tilted run, and the masks glittering, the eyes hot with delight and fantastic welcoming, the flights of hands on the disturbed air in upflung dove-winged rifle-shot flight. He felt the steps collide with his shoes. The applause slammed to a shutdown.

He swallowed. Then slowly he ascended the steps and stood in the full light with a thousand masks fixed to him and two thousand eyes watchful, and he sat in the empty chair, and the theater grew darker, and the immense hearth-bellow breathing softer out of the lyre-metal throats, and there was only the sound of a mechanical beehive thrived with machinery-musk in the dark.

He held to his knees. He let go. And at last he spoke:

"To be or not to be—"

The silence was complete.

Not a cough. Not a stir. Not a rustle. Not a blink. All waited. Perfection. The perfect audience. Perfect, forever and forever. Perfect. Perfect.

He tossed his words slowly into that perfect pond and felt the soundless ripples disperse and gentle away.

"—that is the question."

He talked. They listened. He knew that they would never let him go now. They would beat him insensible with applause. He would sleep a child's sleep and rise to speak again. All of Shakespeare, all of Shaw, all of Molière, every bit, crumb, lump, joint, and piece. *Himself* in repertory!

He arose to finish.

Finished, he thought: Bury me! Cover me! Smother me deep!

Obediently, the avalanche came down the mountain.

Cara Corelli found a palace of mirrors.

The maid remained outside.

And Cara Corelli went in.

As she walked through a maze, the mirrors took away a day, and then a week, and then a month and then a year and then two years of time from her face.

It was a palace of splendid and soothing lies. It was like being young once more. It was like being surrounded by all those tall bright glass mirror men who would never again in your life tell you the truth.

Cara walked to the center of the palace. By the time she stopped she saw herself twenty-five-years old, in every tall bright mirror face.

She sat down in the middle of the bright maze. She beamed around in happiness.

The maid waited outside for perhaps an hour. And then she went away.

This was a dark place with shapes and sizes as yet unseen. It smelled of lubricating oil, the blood of tyrant lizards with cogs and wheels for teeth, which lay strewn and silent in the dark waiting.

A titan's door slowly gave a slithering roar like a swept-back armored tail, and Parkhill stood in the rich oily wind blowing out around him. He felt as if someone has pasted a white flower on his face. But it was only a sudden surprise of a smile.

His empty hands hung at his sides and they made impulsive and completely unconscious gestures forward. They beggared the air. So, paddling silently, he let himself be moved into the Garage, Machine Shop, Repair Shed, whatever it was.

And filled with holy delight and a child's holy and unholy glee at what he beheld, he walked and slowly turned.

For as far as his eye could see stood vehicles.

Vehicles that ran on the earth. Vehicles that flew in the air. Vehicles that stood ready with wheels to go in any direction. Vehicles with two wheels. Vehicles with three or four or six or eight. Vehicles that looked like butterflies. Vehicles that resembled ancient motorbikes. Three thousand stood ranked here, four thousand glinted ready there. Another thousand were tilted over, wheels off, viscera exposed, waiting to be repaired. Still another thousand were lifted high on spidery repair hoists, their lovely undersides revealed to view, their discs and tubes and coggeries all intricate and fine and needful of touching, unbolting, revalving, rewiring, oiling, delicately lubricating...

Parkhill's palms itched.

He walked forward through the primeval smell of swamp oils among the dead and waiting to be revived ancient but new armored mechanical reptiles, and the more he looked the more he ached his grin.

The City was a city all right, and, to a point, self-sustaining. But, eventually, the rarest butterflies of metal gossamer, gaseous oil, and fiery dream sank to earth, the machines that repaired the machines that repaired the machines grew old, ill, and damaging of themselves. Here then was the Bestial Garage, the slumbrous Elephant's Boneyard where the aluminum dragons crawled rusting out their souls, hopeful of one live person left among so much active but dead metal, that person to put things right. One God of the machines to say, you Lazarus-elevator, rise up! You hovercraft, be reborn! And anoint them with leviathan oils, tap them with magical wrench and send them forth to almost eternal lives in and on the air and above the quicksilver paths.

Parkhill moved among nine hundred robot men and women slaughtered by simple corrosion. He would cure their rust.

Now. If he started now, thought Parkhill, rolling up his sleeves, and staring off down a corridor of machines that ran waiting for a solid mile of garage, shed, hoist, lift, storage bin, oil tank, and strewn shrapnel of tools glittering and ready for his grip; if he started now, he might work his way to the end of the giant's ever-constant garage, accident, collision, and repair works shed in thirty years!

A billion bolts to be tightened. A billion motors to be tinkered! A billion iron tripes to lie under, a grand oil-dripped upon orphan, alone, alone, alone with the always beautiful and never talking back hummingbird-commotion devices, accoutrements and miraculous contraptions.

His hands weighed him toward the tools. He clutched a wrench. He found a forty-wheeled low running sled. He lay down on it. He sculled the garage in a long whistling ride. The sled scuttled.

Parkhill vanished beneath a great car of some ancient design.

Out of sight, you could hear him working on the gut of the machine. On his back, he talked up at it. And when he slapped it to life, at last, the machine talked back.

Always the silver pathways ran somewhere.

Thousands of years now they had run empty, carrying only dust to destinations away and away among the high and dreaming buildings.

Now, on one traveling path, Aaronson came borne like an aging statue.

And the more the road propelled him, the faster the City exposed itself to his view, the more buildings that passed, the more parks that sprang into sight, the more his smile faded. His color changed.

"Toy," he heard himself whisper. The whisper was ancient. "Just another," and here his voice grew so small it faded away, "...another Toy."

A super-Toy, yes. But his life was full of such and had always been so. If it was not some slot machine it was the next-size dispenser or a jumbo-size razzmatazz hi-fi stereo speaker. From a lifetime of handling metallic sandpaper, he felt his arms rubbed away to a nub. Mere pips, his fingers. No, handless, and lacking wrists. Aaronson, the Seal Boy!!! His mindless flippers clapped applause to a city that was, in reality, no more and no less than an economy-size jukebox ravening under its idiot breath. And—he knew the tune! God help him. He knew the tune.

He blinked just once.

An inner eyelid came down like cold steel.

He turned and tread the silver waters of the path.

He found a moving river of steel to take him back toward the Great Gate itself.

On the way, he met the Corelli maid, wandering lost on her own silver stream.

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As for the poet and his wife, their running battle tore echoes everywhere. They cried down thirty avenues, cracked panes in two hundred shops, battered leaves from seventy varieties of park bush and tree, and only ceased when drowned by a thundering fountain display they passed like a rise of clear fireworks upon the metropolitan air.

"The whole thing is," said his wife, punctuating one of his dirtier responses, "you only came along so you could lay hands on the nearest woman and spray her ears with bad breath and worse poetry."

The poet muttered a foul word.

"You're worse than the actor," said his wife. "Always at it. Don't you ever shut up?"

"Don't you?" he cried. "Ah God, I've curdled inside. Shut up, woman, or I'll throw myself in the founts!"

"No. You haven't bathed in years. You're the pig of the century! Your picture will grace the Swine Herder's Annual next month!"

"That *did* it!"

Doors slammed on a building.

By the time she got off and ran back and fisted the doors, they were locked.

"Coward!" she shrieked. "Open up!"

A foul word came echoing out, dimly.

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"Ah, listen to that sweet silence," he whispered, to himself, in the great shelled dark.

Harpwell found himself in a soothing hugeness, a vast womb-like building, over which hung a canopy of pure serenity, a starless void.

In the middle of this room which was roughly a two-hundred-foot circle stood a device, a machine. In this machine were dials and rheostats and switches, a seat, and a steering wheel.

"What kind of vehicle is this?" whispered the poet, but edged near, and bent to touch. "Christ-off-the-cross-and-bearing-mercy, it smells of what? Blood and mere guts? No, for it's clean as a virgin's frock. Still it does fill the nose. Violence. Simple destruction. I can feel the damn carcass tremble like a nervous highbred hound. It's full of *stuffs*. Let's try a swig."

He sat in the machine.

"What do I swig first? This?"

He snapped a switch.

The Baskerville-hound machine whimpered in its dog slumberings.

"Good beast." He flicked another switch. "How do you go, brute? When the damn device is in full tilt, where to? You lack wheels. Well, surprise me. I dare."

The machine shivered.

The machine bolted.

It ran. It dashed.

He held tight to the steering wheel.

"Holy God!"

For he was on a highway, racing fast.

Air sluiced by. The sky flashed over in running colors.

The speedometer read seventy, eighty.

And the highway ribboned away ahead, flashing toward him. Invisible wheels slapped and banged on an increasingly rough road.

Far away, ahead, a car appeared.

It was running fast. And—

"It's on the wrong side of the road! Do you see that, wife? The wrong side."

Then he realized his wife was not here.

He was alone in a car racing—ninety miles an hour now—toward another car racing at a similar speed.

He veered the wheel.

His vehicle moved to the left.

Almost instantly the other car did a compensating move, and ran back over to the right.

"The damn fool, what does he think—where's the blasted brake?"

He stomped the floor. There was no brake. Here was a strange machine indeed. One that ran as fast as you wished, but never stopped until what? it ran itself down? There was no brake.

Nothing but—further accelerators. A whole series of round-buttons on the floor, which, as he tromped them, surged power into the motor.

Ninety, one hundred, one hundred twenty miles an hour.

"God in heaven!" he screamed. "We're going to hit! How do you like that, girl?"

And in the last instant before collision, he imagined she rather liked it fine.

The cars hit. They erupted in gaseous flame. They burst apart in flinders. They tumbled. He felt himself jerked now this way and that. He was a torch hurtled skyward. His arms and legs danced a crazy rigadoon in midair as he felt his peppermint stick bones snap in brittle and agonizing ecstasies. Then, clutching death as a dark mate, gesticulating, he fell away in a black surprise, drifting toward further nothings.

He lay dead.

He lay dead a long while.

Then he opened one eye.

He felt the slow burner under his soul. He felt the bubbled water rising to the top of his mind like tea brewing.

"I'm dead," he said, "but alive. Did you see all that, wife? Dead but alive."

He found himself sitting in the vehicle, upright.

He sat there for ten minutes thinking about all that had happened.

"Well now," he mused. "Was that not interesting? Not to say fascinating? Not to say, almost exhilarating? I mean, sure, it knocked the stuff out of me, scared the soul out one ear and back in the other, hit my wind and tore my gut, broke the bones and shook the wits, but, but, but, wife, but, but, but, dear sweet Meg, Meggy, Megan, I wish you were here, it might tamp the tobacco tars out of your half-ass lungs and bray the mossy graveyard backbreaking meanness from your marrow. Let me see here now, wife, let's have a look, Harpwell-my-husband-the-poet."

He tinkered with the dials.

He thrummed the great hound motor.

"Shall we chance another diversion? Try another embattled picnic excursion? Let's."

And he set the car on its way.

Almost immediately, the vehicle was traveling one hundred and then one hundred fifty miles per hour.

Almost immediately, the opposing car appeared ahead.

"Death," said the poet. "Are you always here, then? Do you hang about? Is this your questing place? Let's test your mettle!"

The car raced. The other car hurtled.

He wheeled over into the other lane.

The other car followed, homing toward Destroy.

"Yes, I see, well, then, this," said the poet.

And switched a switch and jumped another throttle.

In the instant before impact, the two cars transformed themselves. Shuttering through illusory veils, they became jet craft at take-off. Shrieking, the two jets banged flame, tore air, yammered back sound-barrier explosions before the mightiest one of all—as the two bullets impacted, fused, interwove, interlaced blood, mind, and eternal blackness, and fell away into a net of strange and peaceful midnight.

I'm dead, he thought again.

And it feels fine, thanks.

He awoke to feel a smile on his face.

He was seated in the vehicle.

Twice dead, he thought, and feeling better each time. Why? isn't that odd? Curiouser and curiouser. Queer beyond queerness.

He thrummed the motor again.

What this time?

Does it locomote? he wondered. How about a big black choo-choo train out of half-primordial times?

And he was on his way, an engineer. The sky flicked over, and the motion-picture screens or whatever they were pressed in with swift illusions of pouring smoke and steaming whistle and huge wheel within wheel on grinding track, and the track ahead wound through hills, and far on up around a mountain came another train, black as a buffalo herd, pouring belches of smoke, on the same two rails, the same track, heading toward wondrous accident.

"I see," said the poet. "I do begin to see. I begin to know what this and what used for, for such as me, the poor wandering idiots of a world, confused, and sore put upon by mothers as soon as dropped from wombs, insulted with Christian guilt, and gone mad from the need of destruction, and collecting a pittance of hurt here and scar tissue there, and a larger portable wife grievance beyond, but one thing sure, we do want to die, we do want to be killed, and here's the very thing for it, in convenient quick pay! So pay it out, machine, dole it out, sweet raving device! Rape away, death! I'm your very man."

And the two locomotives met and climbed each other. Up a black ladder of explosion they wheeled and locked their drive shafts and plastered their slick Negro bellies together and rubbed boilers and beautifully banged the night in a single outflung whirl and flurry of shrapnel and flame. Then the locomotives, in a cumbrous rapine dance, seized and melted together with their violence and passion, gave a monstrous curtsy and fell off the mountain and took a thousand years to go all the way down to the rocky pits.

The poet awoke and immediately grabbed the controls. He was humming under his breath, stunned. He was singing wild tunes. His eyes flashed. His heart beat swiftly.

"More, more, I see it now, I know what to do, more, more, please, oh God, more, for the truth shall set me free, more!"

He hoofed three, four, five pedals.

He snapped six switches.

The vehicle was auto-jet-locomotive-glider-missile-rocket.

He ran, he steamed, he roared, he soared, he flew. Cars veered toward him. Locomotives loomed. Jets rammed. Rockets screamed.

And in one wild three-hour spree he hit two hundred cars, rammed twenty trains, blew up ten gliders, exploded forty missiles, and, far out in space, gave up his glorious soul in a final Fourth of July Death celebration as an interplanetary rocket going two hundred thousand miles an hour struck an iron meteor and went beautifully to hell.

In all, in a few short hours he figured he must have been torn apart and put back together a few-times less than five hundred.

When it was all over, he sat not touching the wheel, his feet free of the pedals.

After a half hour of sitting there, he began to laugh. He threw his head back and let out great warwhoops. Then he got up, shaking his head, drunker than ever in his life, really drunk now, and he knew he would stay that way forever, and never need drink again.

I'm punished, he thought, really punished at last. Really hurt at last, and hurt enough, over and over, so I will never need hurt again, never need to be destroyed again, never have to collect another insult, or take another wound, or ask for a simple grievance. God bless the genius of man and the inventors of such machines, that enable the guilty to pay and at last be rid of the dark albatross and the awful burden. Thank you, City, thank you, old blueprinter of needful souls. Thank you. And which way out?

A door slid open.

His wife stood waiting for him.

"Well, there you are," she said. "And still drunk."

"No," he said. "Dead."

"Drunk."

"Dead," he said, "beautifully dead at last. Which means, free. I won't need you any more, dead Meg, Meggy-Megan. You're set free, also, like an awful conscience. Go haunt someone else, girl. Go destroy. I forgive you your sins on me, for I have at last forgiven myself. I am off the Christian hook. I am the dear wandering dead who, dead, can at last live. Go and do likewise, lady. Inside with you. Be punished and set free. So long, Meg. Farewell. Toodleoo."

He wandered away.

"Where do you think you're going?" she cried.

"Why, out into life and the blood of life and happy at last."

"Come back here!" she screamed.

"You can't stop the dead, for they wander the universe, happy as children in the dark field."

"Harpwell!" she brayed. "Harpwell!"

But he stepped on a river of silver metal.

And let the dear river bear him laughing until the tears glittered on his cheeks, away and away from the shriek and the bray and the scream of that woman, what was her name? no matter, back there, and gone.

And when he reached the Gate he walked out and along the canal in the fine day, heading toward the far towns. By that time, he was singing every old tune he had known as a child of six.

It was a church.

No, not a church.

Wilder let the door swing shut.

He stood in cathedral darkness, waiting.

The roof, if roof there was, breathed up in a great suspense, flowed up beyond reach or sight.

The floor, if floor there was, was a mere firmness beneath. It, too, was black.

And then, the stars came out. It was like that first night of childhood when his father had taken him out beyond the city to a hill where the lights could not diminish the Universe. And there were a thousand, no ten thousand, no ten million billion stars filling the darkness. The stars were manifold and bright, and they did not care. Even then he had known: they do not care. If I breathe or do not breathe, live or die, the eyes that look from all around don't care. And he had seized his father's hand and gripped tight, as if he might fall up into that abyss.

Now, in this building, he was full of the old terror and the old sense of beauty and the old silent crying out after mankind. The stars filled him with pity for small men lost in so much size.

Then yet another thing happened.

Beneath his feet, space opened wide and let through yet another billion sparks of light.

He was suspended as a fly is held upon a vast telescopic lens. He walked on a water of space. He stood upon a transparent flex of great eye, and all about him, as on a night in winter, beneath foot and above head, in all directions, were nothing but stars.

So, in the end, it was a church, it was a cathedral, a multitude of farflung universal shrines, here a worshipping of Horsehead Nebula, there Orion's galaxy, and there Andromeda, like the head of God, fiercely gazed and thrust through the raw dark stuffs of night to stab his soul and pin it writhing against the backside of his flesh.

God, everywhere, fixed him with shutterless and unblinking eyes.

And he, a bacterial shard of that same Flesh, stared back and winced but the slightest.

He waited. And a planet drifted upon the void. It spun by once with a great mellow autumn face. It circled and came under him.

And he stood upon a far world of green grass and great lush trees, where the air was fresh, and a river ran by like the rivers of childhood, flashing the sun and leaping with fish.

He knew that he had traveled very far to reach this world. Behind him lay the rocket. Behind lay a century of travel, of sleeping, of waiting, and now, here was the reward.

"Mine?" he asked the simple air, the simple grass, the long simplicity of water that spelled by in the shallow sands.

And the world answered wordless: yours.

Yours without the long travel and the boredom, yours without ninety-nine years of flight from Earth, of sleeping in kept tubes, of intravenous feedings, of nightmares dreamt of Earth lost and gone, yours without torture, without pain, yours without trial and error, failure and destruction. Yours without sweat and terror. Yours without a falling down of tears. Yours. Yours.

But Wilder did not put out his hands to accept.

And the sun dimmed in the alien sky.

And the world drifted from under his feet.

And yet another world swam up and passed in a huge parade of even brighter glories.

And this world, too, spun up to take his weight. And here, if anything, the fields were richer green, the mountains capped with melting snows, far fields ripening with strange harvests, and scythes waiting on the edge of fields for him to lift and sweep and cut the grain and live out his life any way that he might.

Yours. The merest touch of weather upon the hairs within his ear said this. Yours.

And Wilder, without shaking his head, moved back. He did not say no. He thought his rejection.

And the grass died in the fields.

The mountains crumbled.

The river shallows ran to dust.

And the world sprang away.

And Wilder stood again in space where God had stood before creating a world out of Chaos.

And at last he spoke and said to himself:

"It would be easy. O Lord, yes, I'd like that. No work, nothing, just accept, but... You can't give me what I want."

He looked at the stars.

"Nothing can be given, ever."

The stars were growing dim.

"It's really very simple. I must borrow, I must earn. I must take."

The stars quivered and died.

"Much obliged and thank you, no."

The stars were all gone.

He turned and, without looking back, walked upon darkness. He hit the door with his palm. He strode out into the City.

He refused to hear if the machine universe behind him cried out in a great chorus, all cries and wounds, like a woman scorned. The crockery in a vast robot kitchen fell. By the time it hit the floor, he was gone.

It was a Museum of Weapons.

The hunter walked among the cases.

He opened a case and hefted a weapon constructed like a spider's antennae.

It hummed, and a flight of metal bees sizzled out the rifle bore, flew away, and stung a target-mannequin some fifty yards away, then fell lifeless, clattering to the floor.

The hunter nodded with admiration, and put the rifle back in the case.

He prowled on, curious as a child, testing yet other weapons here and there which dissolved glass or caused metal to run in bright yellow pools of molten lava.

"Excellent!" "Fine!" "Absolutely great!"

His cry rang out again and again as he slammed cases open and shut, and finally chose the gun.

It was a gun that, without fuss or fury, did away with matter. You pressed the button, there was a brief discharge of blue light, and the target simply vanished. No blood. No bright lava. No trace.

"All right," he announced, leaving the Place of Guns, "we have the weapon. How about the Game, the Grandest Beast ever in the Long Hunt?"

He leapt onto the moving sidewalk. An hour later he had passed a thousand buildings and scanned a thousand open parks without itching his finger.

He moved uneasily from treadway to treadway, shifting speeds now in this direction, now in that.

Until at last he saw a river of metal that sped underground.

Instinctively, he jumped toward that.

The metal stream carried him down into the secret gut of the City.

Here all was warm blood darkness. Here strange pumps moved the pulse of the City. Here were distilled the sweats that lubricated the roadways and lifted the elevators and swarmed the offices and stores with motion.

The hunter half crouched on the roadway. His eyes squinted. Perspiration gathered in his palms. His trigger finger greased the metal gun, sliding.

"Yes," he whispered. "By God, now. This is it. The City itself...the Great Beast. Why didn't I think of that? The Animal City, the terrible prey. It has men for breakfast, lunch, and dinner. It kills them with machines. It munches their bones like breadsticks. It spits them out like toothpicks. It lives long after they die. The City, by God, the City. Well now..."

He glided through dark grottoes of television eyes which showed him remote parkways and high towers.

Deeper within the belly of the underground world he sank as the river lowered itself. He passed a school of computers that chattered in maniac chorus. He shuddered as a cloud of paper confetti from one titian machine, holes punched out to perhaps record his passing, fell upon him in a whispered snow.

He raised his gun. He fired.

The machine disappeared.

He fired again. A skeleton strutwork under yet another machine vanished.

The City screamed.

At first very low and then very high, then, rising, falling, like a siren. Lights flashed. Bells began to ricochet alarums. The metal river shuddered under his feet, slowed. He fired at television screens which glared all white upon him. They blinked out and did not exist.

The City screamed higher until he raved against it, himself, and the marrow of his bones shook out an insanity of black dust.

He did not see, until it was too late, that the road on which he sped fell into the gnashing maw of a machine that was used for some purpose long forgotten centuries before.

He thought that by pressing the trigger he would make the terrible mouth disappear. It did indeed vanish. But as the roadway sped on and he whirled and fell as it picked up speed, he realized at last that his weapon did not truly destroy, it merely made invisible what was there and what still remained though unseen.

He gave a terrible cry to match the cry of the City. He flung out the gun in a last blow. The gun went into cogs and wheels and teeth and was twisted down.

The last thing he saw was a deep elevator shaft that fell away for perhaps a mile into the earth.

He knew that it might take him two minutes to hit the bottom. He shrieked.

The worst thing was, he would be conscious...all the way down...

The rivers shook. The silver rivers trembled. The pathways, shocked, convulsed the metal shores through which they sped.

Wilder, traveling, was almost knocked flat by the concussion.

What had caused the concussion, he could not see. Perhaps, far off, there was a cry, a murmur of dreadful sound, which swiftly faded.

Wilder moved on. The silver track threaded on. But the City seemed poised, agape. The City seemed tensed. Its huge and various muscles were cramped, alert.

Feeling this, Wilder began to walk as well as be moved by the swift path.

"Thank God. There's the Gate. The sooner I'm out of this place the happier I'll—"

The Gate was indeed there, not a hundred yards away. But, on the instant, as if hearing his declaration, the river stopped. It shivered. Then it started to move back, taking him where he did not wish to go.

Incredulous, Wilder spun about, and, in spinning, fell. He clutched at the stuffs of the rushing sidewalk—

His face, pressed to the vibrant grillework of the river-rushing pavement, heard the machineries mesh and mill beneath, humming and agroan, forever sluicing, forever feverish for journeys and mindless excursions. Beneath the calm metal, embattlements of hornets stung and buzzed, lost bees bumbled and subsided. Collapsed, he saw the Gate lost away behind. Burdened, he remembered at last the extra weight upon his back, the jet-power equipment which might give him wings.

He jammed his hand to the switch on his belt. And in the instant before the sidewalk might have pulsed him off among sheds and museum walls, he was airborne.

Flying, he hovered, then swam the air back to hang above a casual Parkhill gazing up, all covered with grease and smiling from a dirty face. Beyond Parkhill, at the Gate, stood the frightened maid. Beyond even further, near the yacht at the landing, stood Aaronson, back turned to the City, nervous to be moving on.

"Where are the others?" cried Wilder.

"Oh, they won't be back," said Parkhill, easily. "It figures, doesn't it? I mean, it's quite a place."

"Place!" said Wilder, hovered now up, now down, turning slowly, apprehensive. "We've got to get them out! It's not safe."

"It's safe if you like it. I like it," said Parkhill.

And all the while there was a gathering of earthquake in the ground and in the air, which Parkhill chose to ignore.

"You're leaving, of course," he said, as if nothing were wrong. "I knew you would. Why?"

"Why?" Wilder wheeled like a dragonfly before a trembling of storm wind. Buffeted up, buffeted down, he flung his words at Parkhill, who didn't bother to duck but smiled up and accepted. "Good God, Sam, the place is Hell. The Martians had enough sense to get out. They saw they had overbuilt themselves. The damn City does everything, which is too much! Sam!"

But at that instant, they both looked round and up. For the sky was shelling over. Great lids were vising in the ceiling. Like an immense flower, the tops of buildings were petalling out to cover themselves. Windows were shutting down. Doors were slamming. A sound of fired cannons echoed through the streets.

The Gate was thundering shut.

The twin jaws of the Gate, shuddering, were in motion.

Wilder cried out, spun round, and dived.

He heard the maid below him. He saw her reach up. Then, swooping, he gathered her in. He kicked the air. The jet lifted them both.

Like a bullet to a target he rammed for the Gate. But an instant before, burdened, he reached it, the Gates banged together. He was barely able to veer course and soar upward along the raw metal as the entire City shook with the roar of the steel.

Parkhill shouted below. And Wilder was flying up, up along the wall, looking this way and that.

Everywhere, the sky was closing in. The petals were coming down, coming down. There was only a last small patch of stone sky to his right. He blasted for that. And kicking, made it through, flying, as the final flange of steel clipped into place, and the City was closed to itself.

He hung for a moment, suspended, and then flew down along the outer wall to the dock where Aaronson stood by the yacht staring at the huge shut Gates.

"Parkhill," whispered Wilder, looking at the City, the walls, the Gates. "You fool. You damned fool."

"Fools, all of them," said Aaronson, and turned away. "Fools. Fools."

They waited a moment longer and listened to the City, humming, alive, kept to itself, its great mouth filled with a few bits of warmth, a few lost people somewhere hid away in there. The Gates would stay shut now, forever. The City had what it needed to go on a long while.

Wilder looked back at the place, as the yacht took them back out of the mountain and away up the canal.

They passed the poet a mile further on, walking along the rim of the canal. He waved them on. "No. No, thanks. I feel like walking. It's a fine day. Good-bye. Go on."

The towns lay ahead. Small towns. Small enough to be run by men instead of running them. He heard the brass music. He saw the neon lights at dusk. He made out the junkyards in the fresh night under the stars.

Beyond the towns stood the silver rockets, tall, waiting to be fired off and away toward the wilderness of stars.

"Real," whispered the rockets, "real stuff. Real travel. Real time. Real space. No gifts. Nothing free. Just a lot of good hard work."

The yacht touched into its home dock.

"Rockets, by God," he murmured. "Wait till I get my hands on you."

He ran away in the night, to do just that.

Holiday

Someone suggested wine for dinner. So Charlie fetched a dusty bottle from the cellar and uncorked it.

"What time is it?" he asked.

"Let's see." Bill raised his watch. "About seven."

The three men in the stone room had drunk beer all afternoon with the radio murmuring in the hot silence. Now, with the sun set, they buttoned their shirts again.

"I'm glad my sister's away in the mountains tonight," said Walter.

"She'll hear about it, anyway, won't she? They have a telegraph up at the villa?"

"Last I heard, it was out of order." Walter tapped his fingers on the stone table. "It's this waiting kills me. I wish I didn't know. I wish I could just look up and see it happen and be surprised and not have time to think."

"Suppose it'll happen tonight?" Bill handed around glasses of the cool wine. He was frying a large omelette on the office stove, with tomato sauce and crisp bacon.

"Who knows?" said Charlie.

"They said it might in the last radiogram that came through before the silence."

Walter opened the large window. The sky was clear, dark, filling with stars. A still quiet warmth as of breathing hung over the village down the hill. Distantly, a canal lay near the horizon, shining.

"Mars is a funny planet," observed Walter, looking out. "I never dreamed I'd wind up living here, a couple million miles from home."

Voices sounded below; two dim figures careened along the alley. "There go Johnson and Remington," said Walter. "Drunker than owls, already. God, how I envy them."

"If there's one time I don't want to be drunk, it's tonight," said Bill, spooning out omelette on three stone plates. "Where's your son, Walt?"

Walter called out the window into the dark, evening street. "Joe!" After a moment, a small voice replied, far away, "Can't I stay out, dad?" "No!" Walter called back. "Come eat!" "But I might miss it," complained Joe, trudging up the back stair, slowly. "Eat and you can run back out," said Walter, as they all sat down to the table. The boy, ten years old and blonde, watched the door and ate rapidly with his spoon. "Slow down," suggested his father. "Some more wine, anybody?" The wine was poured quietly.

They did little conversing during the supper hour.

"My plate's clean; can I go now, dad?"

Walter nodded and the boy ran. His footsteps faded down the alley. Bill said, "He wasn't born on Earth, was he?"

"No. Here in Mars Village, in 1991. His mother divorced me two years later. She went back to Earth. Joe stayed on; the psychologist pointed out that space travel and the change in environments would be too much for Joe. So he stayed here with me."

"This must be quite a night for Joe."

"Yes, he's excited. Means nothing to him, of course; just another entertainment, something new, different."

"Why can't we change the subject?" Charles slammed down his knife and fork. "What time is it?" Somebody told him. "More wine," he gasped, holding the bottle, his hand trembling.

"The Martians are throwing a big shindig in the village tonight," said Bill, helping clear the table. "I don't blame them. We came here to colonize Mars in our rockets and never asked if they wanted us or not. How many Earth men are here on Mars now, Charlie?"

"A thousand; no more than that."

"Well, that makes us a neat minority, doesn't it? Those two million Martians will certainly deserve their celebration on a night like this. They've declared a planet-wide holiday; children out of school and everything. The Big Set-Piece Day they call it. Fireworks and all."

They walked out onto the balcony of the stone house to sit smoking their cigarettes. "I'm sure it won't happen tonight," said Charlie, smiling, sweat on his upper lip.

"Let's not kid ourselves," said Walt, taking out his pipe. "My kid's down in the town now running and screaming with the Martian kids in the big holiday. He's almost a Martian himself. Oh, it'll be tonight all right."

"I wonder what the Martians will do to us?"

Walt shrugged. "Nothing. God, how they must feel about all this. Without having to lift a finger, without having anything to do with the Fireworks, the Martians can watch the display. I think it'll amuse them to let us live on; remnants of a civilization, as it were, that set fire to its own tail."

Bill puffed slowly. "I've got a father, living in Illinois, Lake Bluff, tonight. God, how he hated Communists."

"No kidding?" Charlie laughed, shortly. "I went through Lake Bluff three times in the summer of 1980, when I was twelve."

"I'll be dammed," said Bill.

They sat in darkness, cigarettes glowing. Far away, the running feet, the shouts, the laughs, grew louder. Carnival music sounded, firecrackers exploded, whistles blew. In all the tilted stone houses candles flickered out as shadows moved into the streets.

"They're climbing on their rooftops for the performance," said Bill, quietly, "There're some going up in the hills. They can make a night: of it; take a picnic lunch, sit on a hill-top, wait for the big show, and maybe make a little love. Fine."

"Nice night. Were you ever in Chicago in the summer?" asked Charlie, suddenly. "Hot. I thought I'd die."

The town lights were all gone now. On the silent hills, the people watched the sky.

"Funny," said Bill. "I just thought of Central School, in Mellin Town, Wisconsin. Haven't thought of it in years. We had an old maid teacher named Larribee and—" He stopped, drank his wine, and said nothing else.

Walt's son ran upstairs, panting.

"Is it time?" He flopped on his father's knee.

"Aren't you spending the night with the village boys?" asked Walt. "No, I'll be with you," said Joe. "After all," he explained. "You were born in New York."

"Thanks," said Walt.

"Who planned the show tonight, the fireworks, dad?"

"I wish I knew."

In the east, a green star rose.

Below, in the town, a murmur sounded.

"Is that Earth in the sky, dad?"

"Yes."

"Tell me about the set-piece and the fireworks, huh?"

"Well, it took a lot of money, people and time to build."

"How long?"

"Fifty years, I guess."

"That's pretty long."

Walt held his son and the night wind rose across the alleys, slow and trembling. "I don't see nothing," said Joe. "Hush," whispered his father. They held their breath.

Earth was clear and green in the heavens.

"Hell," said Charlie. "It's a false alarm. I'll open a new bottle and—" He started to stand up.

The sky exploded.

"There!" cried Bill.

They fell back as the whiteness burned the sky. Earth grew violently, flaming, twice, four times normal size. Fire pushed away darkness with no sound. Like a great green-red flare, the illumination rushed over upturned faces on the hills, in house windows, on rooftops, in valleys, by the rivers and the long canals and the dead seas. The white flame burned briefly in the eyes of the three waiting men.

The light faded.

On the hill sides a vast exultant sigh went up, there was a dinning of drums, a shouting. Joe turned to his father. "Is that all?"

The three men held cigarettes unlit in their slumped hands.

"That's all," said Walt, eyes shut. "Show's over."

"When will it happen again?" asked Joe.

Walt got up swiftly. "Look; here's the cellar key. Run down and carry up four bottles of wine. That's a good boy. Hurry."

They sat without a word on the cold balcony until the boy brought the bottles up from the cellar.

Payment in Full

"To Earth!"

"*To Mars.*"

"*To the atom bomb!*"

"*To the explosion.*"

They drank again. Three men sitting under Martian stars, on a Martian sea bottom. Three men from a small silver rocket ship. Three trembling and violent men, the whiskey burning their mouths. Sweating and shivering and crying out. The rocket did not move. The Martian canal waters lay black in the stone channels. They opened a new bottle.

"Here's to good old beautiful, dumb, exploded and gone forever Earth," cried Jones.

"Marry me, Williams," said Comfort. "Marry me and be my love, and we will all the pleasures prove..."

"Shut up."

"Marry me. We'll start civilization again."

"Sit down!"

Comfort sat down and cried. Comfort hit his hand and felt the tears on his fingers, quick and hot. Only six hours ago, Jones, Williams and himself were provisioning their rocket to return to Earth. They were the last ones on Mars. They had wondered if the atom war was as bad as the space radio claimed. They had joked about it. They had figured to be in New York in a month.

And then—that violent blue flash in the sky.

Earth, burning, a new small sun, had set over the horizon.

They had started drinking immediately.

Here they were, numb with time and the night, with the burning and the terror, with the whiskey and the nightmare.

Jones swallowed a drink, looking at nothing. "Here's to Alice and my sister and my brother Herb and grandmother and mom and dad and—" He stopped.

"Here's to the Milwaukee zoo." Comfort laughed quietly. "Here's to the snow I shoveled off the Mellin Town sidewalks in Illinois. Here's to spring in Central Park. Here's to a Venice, California spaghetti joint, April, 1968—"

"Here's to President F. Roosevelt Jr., here's to Premier Kavolevsky, here's to Prime Minister Barrington-Smith. Here's to all the world's atoms. Here's to atoms named Wanamook Creek and atoms named brook-trout I fried in a

pan in the North Woods. Here's to those atoms that blew through the tall trees nights when I was lying there awake, listening. Here's to all kinds of atoms," said Williams.

Jones swore bitterly. "Dammit! I wish there was something I could do." He stared at the sky until his eyes watered.

"Me, too!" Williams smashed his bottle. "We *got* to do something. There must be some way to fight back, do something, anything!"

"There's nothing you can do," whispered Comfort, eyes shut.

"We've got to, I tell you, we've *got* to!"

A minute later, the Martian appeared.

He walked softly across the sea bottom, alone. He paused in the aura of light from the yellow electric torches. He wore a bronze mask in which his eyes glittered like blue diamonds.

"Hold on." Williams struggled to his feet. "I'm crazy. I think I *see* someone!"

The others saw it, too...

The Martian greeted them. There were no words. There were only his thoughts. These moved in the air, like a breath.

Comfort put his hand out. "He's real. I can feel him!"

The bronze mask nodded. A thought moved on the air about their heads.

"My name is Yio."

"Then there *are* Martians!" The men were numb.

The mask turned. "In the high mountain towns a thousand of us survive. We saw your ships arrive ten moons ago. We saw them go back into the sky. We waited for all of you to go. Tonight, we saw the sky burn. That is why I am here. I come to offer refuge to you last three."

"Keep your refuge!" snapped Williams. "Get out, we'll shift for ourselves!"

"But—"

"We're doing okay," said Jones.

"It sure took you long enough," said Williams. "Why didn't you come down months ago and face up to us, you lousy cowards? Were you afraid? Scared witless, I bet. Right, Comfort? Right, Jones?"

"Right!"

"What you afraid of?" Williams walked a stumbling circle around the Martian, fingering the blue silks that covered the thin body, looking him up and down swiftly. "Us? By Saturn, you should be! We're *Earth*! Earthmen! Best in the universe! Best damn men anywhere, if any men are left, which I doubt! What are *you*?" He snorted. "Man or woman? Let's see behind your mask. I hate people running around in masks!"

The Martian stepped back. "I've come to help you survivors."

"How'd you learn our language? Telepathy? Sneaking all these months, prying at our minds? Sure!" Williams spat. "Well, we're doing no surviving for you,

mister. We're well-adjusted, college-graduated gentlemen; we don't want a thing from you!"

"But is there nothing I can do?"

"Get out," said Comfort. "I'm feeling damn mean."

"More than that." Jones hit one fist into the wet palm of his other hand. "I'm mad and I feel sick. I feel a whole lot I can't say. Don't *push* me, mister."

Comfort thought, we've got to stop. We're rushing somewhere, to something bad, I've got to stop it. We're insane. This Martian can't be here, we've made him up out of our being scared and angry and frustrated. We've got to stop and—

The Martian moved his hands.

"We Martians, too, endured much in our time. We learned wisdom. We turned away from atomic power before it destroyed us. We survive today with libraries, towns, mosaics, fountains—"

"Pretty proud, aren't you?" Williams slapped his gun holster. "Pretty big for your britches. Don't rub it in, mister. Don't say you're here and our friends aren't. A thousand of you left while all our men are gone. Don't give us that kind of talk, you—"

"One must be philosophical," the Martian responded quietly. "Civilizations, planets, rise and fall, some luckier than others. Weapons are bad. On Mars we've used no weapons for ten thousand years."

"Get out," said Williams.

They all felt very nervous and warm. Their mouths twitched and their eyes blinked.

The Martian shrugged. "You are welcome to live in our city. A delightful place; a rose, a jewel, all colors at night, hidden in the hills, lit for the first time tonight because the danger is past. You must see our little gem of a city, its green lawns, its fountains rising and misting the soft air, the children laughing on the blue mosaic promenades, the people drinking rare wines in the villa patios, the women golden, the men handsome in bronze masks, the music singing; all of this you must see."

Comfort, Jones, and Williams moved stiffly forward, their faces rigid.

The Martian named the places. They must visit the deep fount pools where colored inks mixed into patterns every second, they must see the flame pictures in the walls, burning and changing. They must climb the crystal minarets where flowers ten centuries old bloomed forever and forever as delicate as white children, as warm, as tender. They must hear the music composed fifty thousand years ago, played on instruments all wire and wind and memory and porcelain throat...

The three men swayed. The land seemed to melt. Their eyes were fixed wide and their faces were wet.

"Shut up," said Williams.

The Martian opened his mouth.

"I warn you, stop!" said Williams.

The Martian gestured, his voice quiet.

"All right," said Williams.

He drew his gun and fired.

The mask burst into smoking flinders, sparks, fragments. The Martian fell into a soft ruin of veil and body.

Comfort drew his gun and fired into the inert mass. Jones pushed the bundle together and let it fall into the canal waters.

"Now," Williams held his gun tightly. His eyes were bright, his voice was quick. "Where's that town he was talking about?"

The three men nodded at each other.

"We'll find it," they said.

They climbed into their rocket.

"My college was U.C.L.A.," said Comfort, at the rocket controls. They drifted north over the low blue hills. Peering from their rocket windows, they scanned the deep valleys.

"I went to Michigan," said Williams.

"Good old Michigan," said Jones. "I went to S.C. Have a drink on that."

Their mouths were pressed tight. They all felt hot and excited as if something big was going to happen any minute.

We can't do it, thought Comfort, we can't go on. This is crazy and terrible, I'm intelligent, I won't put up with it, I'm educated not to act this way, not at all. I've got to stop it.

He said nothing.

"See anything below?" asked Williams.

"I'm looking." Comfort licked his rough lips. "I'm looking hard."

"When you find it, just let us know."

"Three college men, that's a laugh."

"What's college?"

"I don't know."

"An institution with a campus in a city on Earth."

"What's an institution, what's a campus, what's a city, what's Earth?"

"Atoms."

"Some day I'm going to go back and see what my old Alma Mater looks like."

"Charcoal and sulphur, mummy-dust, ashes, smoke and cinders."

"Good old Michigan; have a drink?"

"Shut up!"

They peered from the rocket ports and blinked.

"There's the city," said Comfort. He smiled.

They all looked.

They all began to smile.

"Well, well," said Jones.

They landed the silver rocket.

They stepped out into the middle of a town where men in bronze masks escorted women in emerald mists. Children ran all about, laughing. Fountains pulsed high into the cool night air. Everything was the color of a rose, of a gardenia, of a water flower, diffusing, shifting. There was fine music playing somewhere. It was a calm night and the air was washed with freshness. Everybody was happy. A cotillion was being danced, people were gliding behind a blue crystal window. Flowers grew, grass was very green. In libraries, people sat with ancient

books, playing them like harps so that ancient voices sang old knowledge in the sweet stillness.

The city hardly knew the rocket had landed.

Those who saw the rocket port swing open had time only to turn, to smile behind their masks.

"Now," said Comfort, with his machine gun."

"Now," said Jones.

"Now." cried Williams.

They pressed the triggers of their three guns.

Bullets kicked towers down in dazzling, clattering heaps. Bullets struck fountains and shattered them into floods of sound and broken pumpings. The three men turned and turned, firing the bullets out. And everywhere lanterns exploded, drapes fell, dancing stopped, music blew apart, glass pillars and walls and stones were uprooted! One tower at which Williams fired jumped out into a million crystals and flowered down like a giant butterfly, with a glass roar and a kind of music. There was nothing solid in the city, bullets touched and did away with all. Masks were punctured, the population lay like fallen grain. Explosions followed one upon another. The Martians did not cry out. They stood where they were.

The bullets sought and silenced, sought again, until source after source, music after music was put asunder, dances spoiled, libraries turned into red fire.

The three men's faces were intent and half smiling.

In the silence, they reloaded their guns and fired again.

"There's a tower we missed!"

They all aimed at it.

"Watch it! A man's escaping!"

They cut him down.

"Music's still playing!"

One last musical instrument, a recording perhaps, played from one of the crystal terraces.

They experimented with their guns until the music ceased.

The city was quiet.

One last tinkle of glass fell.

Then, only the warm, consuming sound of the burning libraries, the lifting wings of light and color and warmth into the blue air.

Their guns were hot and empty.

They walked out of the city, sweating, tired.

They didn't say anything.

They stopped and looked back at all of it where it lay strewn and cluttered. They wiped their lips.

They swabbed out their eyes, blinking rapidly, dazedly, weakly, dully. They held their guns drooping in their hands. They pulled out a final bottle and had a raw hot drink of it and suddenly were so tired they could not walk.

They fell down upon the sand of the sea and lay there, eyes shut.

"Jonesy, Jonesy, Jonesy," Williams began to wail in the long night. "Jonesy?"

"What?"

"Have a drink?"

"Don't mind."

"Here."

They all drank thirstily, spilling it on their dirty uniforms, hands greasy with sweat. The night wind was cold.

"I guess we showed them."

"You bet, you bet, you bet we did!"

Comfort held his head in his hands. "Williams, you didn't say yet, you didn't tell me your answer."

"What?"

They did not move. The night was very dark.

"You didn't say whether you'd marry me, Williams?"

"Oh."

"And we will all the pleasures prove, Willie; we *got* to have seven children to start the new world."

"Sure, sure," said Williams, tired. "The new world. *Ten* children."

"Jones will marry us, won't you, Jonesy old man? You'll be parson, right, Jonesy?"

"Sure, sure."

"That's a boy," said Comfort. "Did you *hear* that, Williams?"

"I heard it. Shut up and go to sleep now. I'll marry you in the morning."

"Promise?"

His voice was high and far away and pleading.

"I promise, yes!"

"Because I need you, Willie, oh, how I need you, I'm so scared!"

"Yeah, sure, I know. Go to sleep. Tired. Tired."

They all shut their eyes and lay in the cold sand. "Pleasant dreams," said Jones.

The Messiah

"We all have that special dream when we are young," said Bishop Kelly.

The others at the table murmured, nodded.

"There is no Christian, boy," the Bishop continued, "who does not some night wonder: am I Him? Is this the Second Coming at long last, and am I It? What, what, oh, what, dear God, if I *were* Jesus? How grand!"

The Priests, the Ministers, and the one lonely Rabbi laughed gently, remembering things from their own childhoods, their own wild dreams, and being great fools.

"I suppose," said the young Priest, Father Niven, "that Jewish boys imagine themselves Moses?"

"No, no, my dear friend," said Rabbi Nittler. "The Messiah! The *Messiah*!"

More quiet laughter, from all.

"Of course," said Father Niven out of his fresh pink-and-cream face, "how stupid of me. Christ *wasn't* the Messiah, was he? And your people are still waiting for Him to arrive. Strange. Oh, the ambiguities."

"And nothing more ambiguous than this." Bishop Kelly rose to escort them all out onto a terrace which had a view of the Martian hills, the ancient Martian towns, the old highways, the rivers of dust, and Earth, sixty million miles away, shining with a clear light in this alien sky.

"Did we ever in our wildest dreams," said the Reverend Smith, "imagine that one day each of us would have a Baptist Church, a St. Mary's Chapel, a Mount Sinai Synagogue here, here on Mars?"

The answer was no, no, softly, from them all.

Their quiet was interrupted by another voice which moved among them. Father Niven, as they stood at the balustrade, had tuned his transistor radio to check the hour. News was being broadcast from the small new American-Martian wilderness colony below. They listened:

"—rumored near the town. This is the first Martian reported in our community this year. Citizens are urged to respect any such visitor. If—"

Father Niven shut the news off.

"Our elusive congregation," sighed the Reverend Smith. "I must confess, I came to Mars not only to work with Christians, but hoping to invite *one* Martian to Sunday supper, to learn of his theologies, *his* needs."

"We are still too new to them," said Father Lipscomb. "In another year or so I think they will understand we're not buffalo hunters in search of pelts. Still, it *is* hard to keep one's curiosity in hand. After all, our *Mariner* photographs indicated no life whatsoever here. Yet life there is, very mysterious and half-resembling the human."

"Half, Your Eminence?" The Rabbi mused over his coffee. "I feel they are even more human than ourselves. They have *let* us come in. They have hidden in the hills, coming among us only on occasion, we guess, disguised as Earthmen—"

"Do you really believe they have telepathic powers, then, and hypnotic abilities which allow them to walk in our towns, fooling us with masks and visions, and none of us the wiser?"

"I do so believe."

"Then this," said the Bishop, handing around brandies and crème-de-menthes, "is a true evening of frustrations. Martians who will not reveal themselves so as to be Saved by Us the Enlightened—"

Many smiles at this.

"—and Second Comings of Christ delayed for several thousand years. How long must we wait, O Lord?"

"As for myself," said young Father Niven, "I never wished to *be* Christ, the Second Coming. I just always wanted, with all my heart, to *meet* Him. Ever since I was eight I have thought on that. It might well be the first reason I became a priest."

"To have the inside track just in case He ever *did* arrive again?" suggested the Rabbi, kindly.

The young Priest grinned and nodded. The others felt the urge to reach and touch him, for he had touched some vague small sweet nerve in each. They felt immensely gentle.

"With your permission, Rabbi, gentlemen," said Bishop Kelly, raising his glass. "To the First Coming of the Messiah, or the Second Coming of Christ. May they be more than some ancient, some foolish dreams."

They drank and were quiet.

The Bishop blew his nose and wiped his eyes.

The rest of the evening was like many another for the Priests, the Reverends, and the Rabbi. They fell to playing cards and arguing St. Thomas Aquinas, but failed under the onslaught of Rabbi Nittler's educated logic. They named him Jesuit, drank nightcaps, and listened to the late radio news:

"—it is feared this Martian may feel trapped in our community. Anyone meeting him should turn away, so as to let the Martian pass. Curiosity seems his motive. No cause for alarm. That concludes our—"

While heading for the door, the Priests, Ministers, and Rabbi discussed translations they had made into various tongues from Old and New Testaments. It was then that young Father Niven surprised them:

"Did you know I was once asked to write a screenplay on the Gospels? They needed an *ending* for their film!"

"Surely," protested the Bishop, "there's only *one* ending to Christ's life?"

"But, Your Holiness, the Four Gospels tell it with four variations. I compared. I grew excited. Why? Because I rediscovered something I had almost forgotten. The Last Supper isn't really the Last Supper!"

"Dear me, what is it then?"

"Why, Your Holiness, the first of several, sir. The first of several! After the Crucifixion and Burial of Christ, did not Simon-called-Peter, with the Disciples, fish the Sea of Galilee?"

"They did."

"And their nets were filled with a miracle of fish?"

"They were."

"And seeing on the shore of Galilee a pale light, did they not land and approach what seemed a bed of white-hot coals on which fresh-caught fish were baking?"

"Yes, ah, yes," said the Reverend Smith.

"And there beyond the glow of the soft charcoal fire, did they not sense a Spirit Presence and call out to it?"

"They did."

"Getting no answer, did not Simon-called-Peter whisper again, 'Who is there?' And the unrecognized Ghost upon the shore of Galilee put out its hand into the fire-light, and in the palm of that hand, did they not see the mark where the nail had gone in, the stigmata that would never heal?

"They would have fled, but the Ghost spoke and said, 'Take of these fish and feed thy brethren.' And Simon-called-Peter took the fish that baked upon the white-hot coals and fed the Disciples. And Christ's frail Ghost then said, 'Take of my word and tell it among the nations of all the world and preach therein forgiveness of sin.'

"And then Christ left them. And, in my screenplay, I had Him walk along the shore of Galilee toward the horizon. And when anyone walks toward the horizon, he seems to ascend, yes? For all land rises at a distance. And He walked on along the shore until He was just a small mote, far away. And then they could see Him no more.

"And as the sun rose upon the ancient world, all His thousand footprints that lay along the shore blew away in the dawn winds and were as nothing.

"And the Disciples left the ashes of that bed of coals to scatter in sparks, and with the taste of Real and Final and True Last Supper upon their mouths, went away. And in my screenplay, I had my CAMERA drift high above to watch the Disciples move, some north, some south, some to the east, to tell the world what Needed to Be Told about One Man. And their footprints, circling in all directions, like the spokes of an immense wheel, blew away out of the sand in the winds of morn. And it was a new day. THE END."

The young Priest stood in the center of his friends, cheeks fired with color, eyes shut. Suddenly he opened his eyes, as if remembering where he was:

"Sorry."

"For what?" cried the Bishop, brushing his eyelids with the back of his hand, blinking rapidly. "For making me weep twice in one night? What, self-conscious in

the presence of your own love for Christ? Why, you have given the Word back to me, *me*! Who has known the Word for what seems a thousand years! You have freshened my soul, oh good young man with the heart of a boy. The eating of fish on Galilee's shore *is* the True Last Supper. Bravo. You deserve to meet Him. The Second Coming, it's only fair, must be for you!"

"I am unworthy!" said Father Niven.

"So are we all! But if a trade of souls were possible, I'd loan mine out on this instant to borrow yours fresh from the laundry. Another toast, gentlemen? To Father Niven! And then, good night, it's late, good night."

The toast was drunk and all departed; the Rabbi and the Ministers down the hill to their holy places, leaving the Priests to stand a last moment at their door looking out at Mars, this strange world, and a cold wind blowing.

Midnight came and then one and two, and at three in the cold deep morning of Mars, Father Niven stirred. Candles flickered in soft whispers. Leaves fluttered against his window.

Suddenly he sat up in bed, half-startled by a dream of mob cries and pursuits. He listened.

Far away, below, he heard the shutting of an outside door.

Throwing on a robe, Father Niven went down the dim rectory stairs and through the church where a dozen candles here or there kept their own pools of light.

He made the rounds of all the doors, thinking: Silly, why lock churches? What is there to steal? But still he prowled the sleeping night...

...and found the front door of the church unlocked, and softly being pushed in by the wind.

Shivering, he shut the door.

Soft running footsteps.

He spun about.

The church lay empty. The candle flames leaned now this way, now that in their shrines. There was only the ancient smell of wax and incense burning, stuffs left over from all the marketplaces of time and history; other suns, and other moons.

In the midst of glancing at the crucifix above the main altar, he froze.

There was a sound of a single drop of water falling in the night.

Slowly he turned to look at the baptistery in the back of the church.

There were no candles there, yet—

A pale light shone from that small recess where stood the baptismal font.

"Bishop Kelly?" he called, softly.

Walking slowly up the aisle, he grew very cold, and stopped because—

Another drop of water had fallen, hit, dissolved away.

It was like a faucet dripping somewhere. But there were no faucets. Only the baptismal font itself, into which, drop by drop, a slow liquid was falling, with three heartbeats between each sound.

At some secret level, Father Niven's heart told itself something and raced, then slowed and almost stopped. He broke into a wild perspiration. He found himself unable to move, but move he must, one foot after the other, until he reached the arched doorway of the baptistery.

There was indeed a pale light within the darkness of the small place.

No, not a light. A shape. A figure.

The figure stood behind and beyond the baptismal font. The sound of falling water had stopped.

His tongue locked in his mouth, his eyes flexed wide in a kind of madness, Father Niven felt himself struck blind. Then vision returned, and he dared cry out:

"Who!"

A single word, which echoed back from all around the church, which made candle flames flutter in reverberation, which stirred the dust of incense, which frightened his own heart with its swift return in saying: Who!

The only light within the baptistery came from the pale garments of the figure that stood there facing him. And this light was enough to show him an incredible thing.

As Father Niven watched, the figure moved. It put a pale hand out upon the baptistery air.

The hand hung there as if not wanting to, a separate thing from the Ghost beyond, as if it were seized and pulled forward, resisting, by Father Niven's dreadful and fascinated stare to reveal what lay in the center of its open white palm.

There was fixed a jagged hole, a cincture from which, slowly, one by one, blood was dripping, falling away down and slowly down, into the baptismal font.

The drops of blood struck the holy water, colored it, and dissolved in slow ripples.

The hand remained for a stunned moment there before the Priest's now-blind, now-seeing eyes.

As if struck a terrible blow, the Priest collapsed to his knees with an outgasped cry, half of despair, half of revelation, one hand over his eyes, the other fending off the vision.

"No, no, no, no, no, no, no, it *can't*!"

It was as if some dreadful physician of dentistry had come upon him without narcotic and with one seizure entire-extracted his soul, bloodied raw, out of his body. He felt himself prised, his life yanked forth, and the roots, O God, were...*deep*!

"No, no, no, no!"

But, yes.

Between the lacings of his fingers, he looked again.

And the Man was there.

And the dreadful bleeding palm quivered dripping upon the baptistery air.

"Enough!"

The palm pulled back, vanished. The Ghost stood waiting.

And the face of the Spirit was good and familiar. Those strange beautiful deep and incisive eyes were as he knew they always must be. There was the gentleness of the mouth, and the paleness framed by the flowing locks of hair and beard. The Man

was robed in the simplicity of garments worn upon the shores and in the wilderness near Galilee.

The Priest, by a great effort of will, prevented his tears from spilling over, stopped up his agony of surprise, doubt, shock, these clumsy things which rioted within and threatened to break forth. He trembled.

And then saw that the Figure, the Spirit, the Man, the Ghost, Whatever, was trembling, too.

No, thought the Priest, He can't be! Afraid? Afraid of...*me*?

And now the Spirit shook itself with an immense agony not unlike his own, like a mirror image of his own concussion, gaped wide its mouth, shut up its own eyes, and mourned:

"Oh, please, let me go."

At this the young Priest opened his eyes wider and gasped. He thought: But you're free. No one keeps you here!

And in that instant: "Yes!" cried the Vision. "You keep me! Please! Avert your gaze! The more you look the more I become *this*! I am *not* what I seem!"

But, thought the Priest, I did not speak! My lips did not move! How does this Ghost know my mind?

"I know all you think," said the Vision, trembling, pale, pulling back in baptistery gloom. "Every sentence, every word. I did not mean to come. I ventured into town. Suddenly I was many things to many people. I ran. They followed. I escaped here. The door was open. I entered. And then and then—oh, and then was trapped."

No, thought the Priest.

"Yes," mourned the Ghost. "By you."

Slowly now, groaning under an even more terrible weight of revelation, the Priest grasped the edge of the font and pulled himself, swaying, to his feet. At last he dared force the question out:

"You are not...what you seem?"

"I am not," said the other. "Forgive me."

I, thought the Priest, shall go mad.

"Do not," said the Ghost, "or I shall go down to madness with you."

"I can't give you up, oh, dear God, now that you're here, after all these years, all my dreams, don't you see, it's asking too *much*. Two thousand years, a whole race of people have waited for your return! And I, I am the one who meets you, sees you—"

"You meet only your own dream. You see only your own need. Behind all this—" the figure touched its own robes and breast, "I am another thing."

"What must I *do*!" the Priest burst out, looking now at the heavens, now at the Ghost which shuddered at his cry. "*What*?"

"Avert your gaze. In that moment I will be out the door and gone."

"Just—just like that?"

"Please," said the Man.

The Priest drew a series of breaths, shivering.

"Oh, if this moment could last for just an hour."

"Would you kill me?"

"No!"

"If you keep me, force me into this shape some little while longer, my death will be on your hands."

The Priest bit his knuckles, and felt a convulsion of sorrow wrack his bones.

"You—you are a Martian, then?"

"No more. No less."

"And I have done this to you with my thoughts?"

"You did not mean. When you came downstairs, your old dream seized and made me over. My palms still bleed from the wounds you gave out of your secret mind."

The Priest shook his head, dazed.

"Just a moment more...wait..."

He gazed steadily, hungrily, at the darkness where the Ghost stood out of the light. That face was beautiful. And, oh, those hands were loving and beyond all description.

The Priest nodded, a sadness in him now as if he had within the hour come back from the true Calvary. And the hour was gone. And the coals strewn dying on the sand near Galilee.

"If—if I let you go—"

"You must, oh you must!"

"If I let you go, will you promise—"

"What?"

"Will you promise to come back?"

"Come back?" cried the figure in the darkness.

"Once a year, that's all I ask, come back once a year, here to this place, this font, at the same time of night—"

"Come back...?"

"Promise! Oh, I must know this moment again. You don't know how important it is! Promise, or I won't let you go!"

"I—"

"Say it! Swear it!"

"I promise," said the pale Ghost in the dark. "I swear."

"Thank you, oh thanks."

"On what day a year from now must I return?" The tears had begun to roll down the young Priest's face now. He could hardly remember what he wanted to say and when he said it he could hardly hear:

"Easter, oh, God, yes, Easter, a year from now!"

"Please, don't weep," said the figure. "I will come. Easter, you say? I know your calendar. Yes. Now—" The pale wounded hand moved in the air, softly pleading. "May I go?"

The Priest ground his teeth to keep the cries of woe from exploding forth. "Bless me, and go."

"Like this?" said the voice.

And the hand came out to touch him ever so quietly.

"Quick!" cried the Priest, eyes shut, clenching his fists hard against his ribs to prevent his reaching out to seize. "Go before I keep you forever. Run. Run!"

The pale hand touched him a last time upon his brow. There was a soft run of naked feet.

A door opened upon stars; the door slammed.

There was a long moment when the echo of the slam made its way through the church, to every altar, into every alcove and up like a blind flight of some single bird seeking and finding release in the apse. The church stopped trembling at last, and the Priest laid his hands on himself as if to tell himself how to behave, how to breathe again; be still, be calm, stand tall....

Finally, he stumbled to the door and held to it, wanting to throw it wide, look out at the road which must be empty now, with perhaps a figure in white, far fleeing. He did not open the door.

He went about the church, glad for things to do, finishing out the ritual of locking up. It was a long way around to all the doors. It was a long way to next Easter.

He paused at the font and saw the clear water with no trace of red. He dipped his hand and cooled his brow and temples and cheeks and eyelids.

Then he went slowly up the aisle and laid himself out before the altar and let himself burst forth and really weep. He heard the sound of his sadness go up and come back in agonies from the tower where the bell hung silent.

And he wept for many reasons.

For himself.

For the Man who had been here a moment ago.

For the long time until the rock was rolled back and the tomb found empty again.

Until Simon-Called-Peter once more saw the Ghost upon the Martian shore, and himself Simon-Peter.

And most of all he wept because, oh, because, because...never in his life could he speak of this night to anyone....

Night Call, Collect

What made the old poem run in his mind he could not guess, but run it did:

Suppose and then suppose and then suppose
That wires on the far-slung telephone black poles
Sopped up the billion-flooded words they heard
Each night all night and saved the sense
And meaning of it all.

He stopped. What next? Ah, yes…

Then, jigsaw in the night,
Put all together and
In philosophic phase
Tried words like moron child.

Again he paused. How did the thing end? Wait—

Thus mindless beast
All treasuring of vowels and consonants
Saves up a miracle of bad advice
And lets it filter whisper, heartbeat out
One lisping murmur at a time.
So one night soon someone sits up
Hears sharp bell ring, lifts phone
And hears a Voice like Holy Ghost
Gone far in nebulae
That Beast upon the wire,
Which with sibilance and savorings
Down continental madnesses of time
Says Hell and O
And then Hell-o.

He took a breath and finished:

To such Creation
Such dumb brute lost Electric Beast,
What is your wise reply?

He sat silently.

He sat, a man eighty years old. He sat in an empty room in an empty house on an empty street in an empty town on the empty planet Mars.

He sat as he had sat now for fifty years, waiting.

On the table in front of him lay a telephone that had not rung for a long, long time.

It trembled now with some secret preparation. Perhaps that trembling had summoned forth the poem...

His nostrils twitched. His eyes flared wide.

The phone shivered ever so softly.

He leaned forward, staring at it.

The phone...*rang.*

He leapt up and back, the chair fell to the floor. He cried out:

"No!"

The phone rang again.

"No!"

He wanted to reach out, he did reach out and knock the thing off the table. It fell out of the cradle at the exact moment of its third ring.

"No...oh, no, no," he said softly, hands covering his chest, head wagging, the telephone at his feet. "It can't be...can't be..."

For after all, he was alone in a room in an empty house in an empty town on the planet Mars where no one was alive, only he lived, he was King of the Barren Hill...

And yet...

"...Barton..."

Someone called his name.

No. Some thing buzzed and made a noise of crickets and cicadas in far desert-lands.

Barton? he thought. Why...why that's *me*!

He hadn't heard anyone say his name in so long he had quite forgot. He was not one for ambling about calling himself by name. He had never—

"Barton," said the phone. "Barton. Barton. Barton."

"Shut up!!" he cried.

And kicked the receiver and bent sweating, panting, to put the phone back on its cradle.

No sooner did he do this than the damned thing rang again.

This time he made a fist around it, squeezed it, as if to throttle the sound, but at last, seeing his knuckles burn color away to whiteness, let go and picked up the receiver.

"Barton," said a far voice, a billion miles away.

He waited until his heart had beat another three times and then said: "Barton here," he said.

"Well, well," said the voice, only a million miles away now. "Do you know who this is?"

"Christ," said the old man. "The first call I've had in half a lifetime, and we play games."

"Sorry. How stupid of me. Of course you wouldn't recognize your own voice on the telephone. No one ever does. We are accustomed, all of us, to hearing our voice conducted through the bones of our head. Barton, this is Barton."

"What?"

"Who did you think it was?" said the voice. "A rocket captain? Did you think someone had come to rescue you?"

"No."

"What's the date?"

"July 20, 2097."

"Good Lord. Fifty years! Have you been sitting there that long waiting for a rocket to come from Earth?"

The old man nodded.

"Now, old man, do you know who I am?"

"Yes." He trembled. "I remember. We are one. I am Emil Barton and you are Emil Barton."

"With one difference. You're eighty, I'm only twenty. All of life before me!"

The old man began to laugh and then to cry. He sat holding the phone like a lost and silly child in his fingers. The conversation was impossible, and should not be continued, yet he went on with it. When he got hold of himself he held the phone close and said, "You there! Listen, oh God, if I could warn you! How can I? You're only a voice. If I could show you how lonely the years are. End it, kill yourself! Don't wait! If you knew what it is to change from the thing you are to the thing that is me, today, here, now, at *this* end."

"Impossible!" The voice of the young Barton laughed, far away. "I've no way to tell if you ever get this call. This is all mechanical. You're talking to a transcription, no more. This is 2037. Sixty years in your past. Today, the atom war started on Earth. All colonials were called home from Mars, by rocket. I got left behind!"

"I remember," whispered the old man.

"Alone on Mars," laughed the young voice. "A month, a year, who cares? There are foods and books. In my spare time I've made transcription libraries of ten thousand words, responses, my voice, connected to phone relays. In later months I'll call, have someone to talk with."

"Yes."

"Sixty years from now my own tapes will ring me up. I don't really think I'll be here on Mars that long, it's just a beautifully ironic idea of mine, something to pass the time. Is that really you, Barton? Is that really *me*?"

Tears fell from the old man's eyes. "Yes."

"I've made a thousand Bartons, tapes, sensitive to all questions, in one thousand Martian towns. An army of Bartons over Mars, while I wait for the rockets to return."

"Fool." The old man shook his head, wearily. "You waited sixty years. You grew old waiting, always alone. And now you've become me and you're still alone in the empty cities."

"Don't expect my sympathy. You're like a stranger, off in another country. I can't be sad. I'm alive when I make these tapes. And you're alive when you hear them. Both of us, to the other, incomprehensible. Neither can warn the other, even though both respond, one to the other, one automatically, the other warmly and humanly. I'm human now. You're human later. It's insane. I can't cry, because not knowing the future I can only be optimistic. These hidden tapes can only react to a certain number of stimuli from you. Can you ask a dead man to weep?"

"Stop it!" cried the old man. He felt the familiar seizures of pain. Nausea moved through him, and blackness. "Oh God, but you were heartless. Go away!"

"Were, old man? I *am*. As long as the tapes glide on, as long as spindles and hidden electronic eyes read and select and convert words to send to you, I'll be young and cruel. I'll go on being young and cruel long after you're dead. Good-bye."

"Wait!" cried the old man.

Click.

Barton sat holding the silent phone a long time. His heart gave him intense pain.

What insanity it had been. In his youth how silly, how inspired, those first secluded years, fixing the telephonic brains, the tapes, the circuits, scheduling calls on time relays:

The phone bell.

"Morning, Barton. This is Barton. Seven o'clock. Rise and shine!"

Again!

"Barton? Barton calling. You're to go to Mars Town at noon. Install a telephonic brain. Thought I'd remind you."

"Thanks."

The bell!

"Barton? Barton. Have lunch with me? The Rocket Inn?"

"Right."

"See you. So long!"

Brrrinnnnng!

"That you, B.? Thought I'd cheer you. Firm chin, and all that. The rescue rocket might come tomorrow, to save us."

"Yes, tomorrow, tomorrow, tomorrow, tomorrow."

Click.

But the years had burned into smoke. Barton had muted the insidious phones and their clever, clever repartee. They were to call him only after he was eighty, if he still lived. And now today, the phone ringing, the past breathing in his ear, whispering, remembering.

The phone!

He let it ring.

I don't have to answer it, he thought.

The bell!

There's no one there at all, he thought.

The ringing!

It's like talking to yourself, he thought. But different. Oh God, how different.

He felt his hands lift the phone.

"Hello, old Barton, this is young Barton. I'm twenty-one today! In the last year I've put voice-brains in two hundred more towns. I've populated Mars with Bartons!"

"Yes." The old man remembered those nights six decades ago, rushing over blue hills and into iron valleys, with a truckful of machinery, whistling, happy. Another telephone, another relay. Something to do. Something clever and wonderful and sad. Hidden voices. Hidden, hidden. In those young days when death was not death, time was not time, old age a faint echo from the long cavern of years ahead. That young idiot, that sadistic fool, never thinking someday he might reap this harvest.

"Last night," said Barton, aged twenty-one, "I sat alone in a movie theater in an empty town. I played an old Laurel and Hardy. God, how I laughed."

"Yes."

"I got an idea. I recorded my voice one thousand times on one tape. Broadcast from the town, it sounds like a thousand people. A comforting noise, the noise of a crowd. I fixed it so doors slam in town, children sing, music boxes play, all by clockworks. If I don't look out the window, if I just listen, it's all right. But if I look, it spoils the illusion. I guess I'm getting lonely."

The old man said, "That was your first sign."

"What?"

"The first time you admitted you were lonely."

"I've experimented with smells. As I walk the empty streets, the smell of bacon, eggs, ham, fillets, come from the houses. All done with hidden machines."

"Madness."

"Self-protection!"

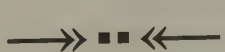
"I'm tired." Abruptly, the old man hung up. It was too much. The past drowning him...

Swaying, he moved down the tower stairs to the streets of the town.

The town was dark. No longer did red neons burn, music play, or cooking smells linger. Long ago he had abandoned the fantasy of the mechanical lie. Listen! Are those footsteps? Smell! Isn't that strawberry pie! He had stopped it all.

He moved to the canal where the stars shone in the quivering waters.

Underwater, in row after fishlike row, rusting, were the robot population of Mars he had constructed over the years, and, in a wild realization of his own insane inadequacy, had commanded to march, one two three four! into the canal deeps, plunging, bubbling like sunken bottles. He had killed them and shown no remorse.



Faintly a phone rang in a lightless cottage.

He walked on. The phone ceased.

Another cottage ahead rang its bell as if it knew of his passing. He began to run. The ringing stayed behind. Only to be taken up by a ringing from now this house—now that, now here, there! He darted on. Another phone!

"All right!" he shrieked, exhausted. "I'm coming!"

"Hello, Barton."

"What do you want!"

"I'm lonely. I only live when I speak. So I must speak. You can't shut me up forever."

"Leave me alone!" said the old man, in horror. "Oh, my heart!"

"This is Barton, age twenty-four. Another couple of years gone. Waiting. A little lonelier. I've read *War and Peace*, drunk sherry, run restaurants with myself as waiter, cook, entertainer. Tonight, I star in a film at the Tivoli—Emil Barton in *Love's Labor Lost*, playing all the parts, some with wigs!"

"Stop calling me—or I'll kill you!"

"You can't kill me. You'll have to find me, first!"

"I'll find you!"

"You've forgotten where you hid me. I'm everywhere, in boxes, houses, cables, towers, underground! Go ahead, try! What'll you call it? Telecide? Suicide? Jealous, are you? Jealous of me here, only twenty-four, bright-eyed, strong young. All right, old man, it's war! Between us. Between me! A whole regiment of us, all ages from against you, the real one. Go ahead, declare war!"

"I'll kill you!"

Click. Silence.

He threw the phone out the window.

In the midnight cold, the automobile moved in deep valleys. Under Barton's feet on the floorboard were revolvers, rifles, dynamite. The roar of the car was in his thin, tired bones.

I'll find them, he thought, and destroy all of them. Oh, God, how can he do this to me?

He stopped the car. A strange town lay under the late moons. There was no wind.

He held the rifle in his cold hands. He peered at the poles, the towers, the boxes. Where was this town's voice hidden? That tower? Or that one there! So many years ago. He turned his head now this way, now that, wildly.

He raised the rifle.

The tower fell with the first bullet.

All of them, he thought. All of the towers in this town will have to be cut apart. I've forgotten. Too long.

The car moved along the silent street.

A phone rang.

He looked at the deserted drugstore.

A phone.

Pistol in hand, he shot the lock off the door, and entered.

Click.

"Hello, Barton? Just a warning. Don't try to rip down all the towers, blow things up. Cut your own throat that way. Think it over..."

Click.

He stepped out of the phone booth slowly and moved into the street and listened to the telephone towers humming high in the air, still alive, still untouched. He looked at them and then he understood.

He could not destroy the towers. Suppose a rocket came from Earth, impossible idea, but suppose it came tonight, tomorrow, next week? And landed on the other side of the planet, and used the phones to try to call Barton, only to find the circuits dead?

Barton dropped his gun.

"A rocket won't come," he argued, softly with himself, "I'm old. It's too late."

But suppose it came, and you never knew, he thought. No, you've got to keep the lines open.

Again, a phone ringing.

He turned dully. He shuffled back into the drugstore and fumbled with the receiver.

"Hello?" A strange voice.

"Please," said the old man, "don't bother me."

"Who's this, who's there? Who is it? Where are you?" cried the voice, surprised.

"Wait a minute." The old man staggered. "This is Emil Barton, who's that?"

"This is Captain Rockwell, Apollo Rocket 48. Just arrived from Earth."

"No, no, no."

"Are you there, Mr. Barton?"

"No, no, it can't be."

"Where are you?"

"You're lying!" The old man had to lean against the booth. His eyes were cold blind. "It's you, Barton, making fun of me, lying again!"

"This is Captain Rockwell. Just landed. In New Chicago. Where are you?"

"In Green Villa," he gasped. "That's six hundred miles from you."

"Look, Barton, can you come here?"

"What?"

"We've repairs on our rocket. Exhausted from the flight. Can you come help?"

"Yes, yes."

"We're at the field outside town. Can you come by tomorrow?"

"Yes, but—"

"Well?"

The old man petted the phone. "How's Earth? How's New York? Is the war over? Who's President now? What happened?"

"Plenty of time for gossip when you arrive."

"Is everything fine?"

"Fine."

"Thank God." The old man listened to the far voice. "Are you sure you're Captain Rockwell?"

"Dammit, man!"

"I'm sorry!"

He hung up and ran.

They were here, after many years, unbelievable, his own people who would take him back to Earth's seas and skies and mountains.

He started the car. He would drive all night. It would be worth a risk, to see people, to shake hands, to hear them again.

The car thundered in the hills.

That voice. Captain Rockwell. It couldn't be himself, forty years ago. He had never made a recording like that. Or had he? In one of his depressive fits, in a spell of drunken cynicism, hadn't he once made a false tape of a false landing on Mars with a synthetic captain, an imaginary crew? He jerked his head, savagely. No. He was a suspicious fool. Now was no time to doubt. He must run with the moons of Mars, all night. What a party they would have!

The sun rose. He was immensely tired, full of thorns and brambles, his heart plunging, his fingers fumbling the wheel, but the thing that pleased him most was the thought of one last phone call: Hello, *young* Barton, this is *old* Barton. I'm leaving for Earth today! Rescued! He smiled weakly.

He drove into the shadowy limits of New Chicago at sundown. Stepping from his car he stood staring at the rocket tarmac, rubbing his reddened eyes.

The rocket field was empty. No one ran to meet him. No one shook his hand, shouted, or laughed.

He felt his heart roar. He knew blackness and a sensation of falling through the open sky. He stumbled toward an office.

Inside, six phones sat in a neat row.

He waited, gasping.

Finally: the bell.

He lifted the heavy receiver.

A voice said, "I was wondering if you'd get there alive."

The old man did not speak but stood with the phone in his hands.

The voice continued, "Captain Rockwell reporting for duty. Your orders, sir?"

"You," groaned the old man.

"How's your heart, old man?"

"No!"

"Had to eliminate you some way, so I could live, if you call a transcription living."

"I'm going out now," replied the old man. "I don't care. I'll blow up everything until you're all dead!"

"You haven't the strength. Why do you think I had you travel so far, so fast? This is your last trip!"

The old man felt his heart falter. He would never make the other towns. The war was lost. He slid into a chair and made low, mournful noises with his mouth. He

glared at the five other phones. As if at a signal, they burst into chorus! A nest of ugly birds screaming!

Automatic receivers popped up.

The office whirled. "Barton, Barton, Barton!"

He throttled a phone in his hands. He choked it and still it laughed at him. He beat it. He kicked it. He furled the hot wire like serpentine in his fingers, ripped it. It fell about his stumbling feet.

He destroyed three other phones. There was a sudden silence.

And as if his body now discovered a thing which it had long kept secret, it seemed to sink upon his tired bones. The flesh of his eyelids fell away like petals. His mouth withered. The lobes of his ears were melting wax. He pushed his chest with his hands and fell face down. He lay still. His breathing stopped. His heart stopped.

After a long spell, the remaining two phones rang.

A relay snapped somewhere. The two phone voices were connected, one to the other.

"Hello, Barton?"

"Yes, Barton?"

"Aged twenty-four."

"I'm twenty-six. We're both young. what's happened?"

"I don't know. Listen."

The silent room. The old man did not stir on the floor. The wind blew in the broken window. The air was cool.

"Congratulate me, Barton, this is my twenty-*sixth* birthday!"

"Congratulations!"

The voices sang together, about birthdays, and the singing blew out the window, faintly, faintly, into the dead city.

The Blue Bottle

The sundials were tumbled into white pebbles. The birds of the air now flew in ancient skies of rock and sand, buried, their songs stopped. The dead sea bottoms were currented with dust which flooded the land when the wind bade it reenact an old tale of engulfment. The cities were deep laid with granaries of silence, time stored and kept, pools and fountains of quietude and memory.

Mars was dead.

Then, out of the large stillness, from a great distance, there was an insect sound which grew large among the cinnamon hills and moved in the sun-blazed air until the highway trembled and dust was shook whispering down in the old cities.

The sound ceased.

In the shimmering silence of midday, Albert Beck and Leonard Craig sat in an ancient landcar, eyeing a dead city which did not move under their gaze but waited for their shout:

"Hello!"

A crystal tower dropped into soft dusting rain.

"You there!"

And another tumbled down.

And another and another fell as Beck called, summoning them to death. In shattering flights, stone animals with vast granite wings dived to strike the courtyards and fountains. His cry summoned them like living beasts and the beasts gave answer, groaned, cracked, leaned up, tilted over, trembling, hesitant, then split the air and swept down with grimaced mouths and empty eyes, with sharp, eternally hungry teeth suddenly seized out and strewn like shrapnel on the tiles.

Beck waited. No more towers fell.

"It's safe to go in now."

Craig didn't move. "For the same reason?"

Beck nodded.

"For a damned *bottle*! I don't understand. Why does everyone want it?"

Beck got out of the car. "Those that found it, they never told, they never explained. But—it's old. Old as the desert, as the dead seas—and it might contain anything. That's what the legend says. And because it *could* hold anything—well, that stirs a man's hunger."

"Yours, not mine," said Craig. His mouth barely moved; his eyes were half-shut, faintly amused. He stretched lazily. "I'm just along for the ride. Better watching you than sitting in the heat."

Beck had stumbled upon the old landcar a month back, before Craig had joined him. It was part of the flotsam of the First Industrial Invasion of Mars that had ended when the race moved on toward the stars. He had worked on the motor and run it from city to dead city, through the lands of the idlers and roustabouts, the dreamers and lazers, men caught in the backwash of space, men like himself and Craig who had never wanted to do much of anything and had found Mars a fine place to do it in.

"Five thousand, ten thousand years back the Martians made the Blue Bottle," said Beck. "Blown from Martian glass—and lost and found and lost and found again and again."

He stared into the wavering heat shimmer of the dead city. All my life, thought Beck, I've done nothing and nothing inside the nothing. Others, better men, have done big things, gone off to Mercury, or Venus, or out beyond the System. Except me. Not me. But the Blue Bottle can *change* all that.

He turned and walked away from the silent car.

Craig was out and after him, moving easily along. "What is it now, ten years you've hunted? You twitch when you sleep, wake up in fits, sweat through the days. You want the damn bottle *that* bad, and don't know what's in it. You're a fool, Beck."

"Shut up, shut up," said Beck, kicking a slide of pebbles out of his way. They walked together into the ruined city, over a mosaic of cracked tiles shaped into a stone tapestry of fragile Martian creatures, long-dead beasts which appeared and disappeared as a slight breath of wind stirred the silent dust.

"Wait," said Beck. He cupped his hands to his mouth and gave a great shout. "You there!"

"...there," said an echo, and towers fell. Fountains and stone pillars folded into themselves. That was the way of these cities. Sometimes towers as beautiful as a symphony would fall at a spoken word. It was like watching a Bach cantata disintegrate before your eyes.

A moment later: bones buried in bones. The dust settled. Two structures remained intact.

Beck stepped forward, nodding to his friend.

They moved in search.

And, searching, Craig paused, a faint smile on his lips. "In that bottle," he said, "is there a little accordion woman, all folded up like one of those tin cups, or like one of those Japanese flowers you put in water and it opens out?"

"I don't need a woman."

"Maybe you do. Maybe you never had a *real* woman, a woman who loved you, so, secretly, that's what you hope is in it." Craig pursed his mouth. "Or maybe, in that bottle, something from your childhood. All in a tiny bundle—a lake, a tree you climbed, green grass, some crayfish. How's *that* sound?"

Beck's eyes focused on a distant point. "Sometimes—that's almost it. The past—Earth. I don't know."

Craig nodded. "What's in the bottle would depend, maybe, on who's looking. Now, if there was a shot of *whiskey* in it..."

"Keep looking," said Beck.

There were seven rooms filled with glitter and shine; from floor to tiered ceiling there were casks, crocks, magnums, urns, vases—fashioned of red, pink, yellow, violet, and black glass. Beck shattered them, one by one, to eliminate them, to get them out of the way so he would never have to go through them again.

Beck finished his room, stood ready to invade the next. He was almost afraid to go on. Afraid that *this* time he would find it; that the search would be over and the meaning would go out of his life. Only after he had heard of the Blue Bottle from fire-travelers all the way from Venus to Jupiter, ten years ago, had life begun to take on a purpose. The fever had lit him and he had burned steadily ever since. If he worked it properly, the prospect of finding the bottle might fill his entire life to the brim. Another thirty years, if he was careful and not *too* diligent, of search, never admitting aloud that it wasn't the bottle that counted at all, but the search, the running and the hunting, the dust and the cities and the going-on.

Beck heard a muffled sound. He turned and walked to a window looking out into the courtyard. A small gray sand cycle had purred up almost noiselessly at the end of the street. A plump man with blond hair eased himself off the spring seat and stood looking into the city. Another searcher. Beck sighed. Thousands of them, searching and searching. But there were thousands of brittle cities and towns and villages and it would take a millennium to sift them all.

"How you doing?" Craig appeared in a doorway.

"No luck." Beck sniffed the air. "Do you smell anything?"

"What?" Craig looked about.

"Smells like—bourbon."

"Ho!" Craig laughed. "That's *me*!"

"You?"

"I just took a drink. Found it in the other room. Shoved some stuff around, a mess of bottles, like always, and one of them had some bourbon in it, so I had myself a drink."

Beck was staring at him, beginning to tremble. "What—what would bourbon be doing *here*, in a Martian bottle?" His hands were cold. He took a slow step forward. "Show me!"

"I'm sure that..."

"*Show* me, damn you!"

It was there, in one corner of the room, a container of Martian glass as blue as the sky, the size of a small fruit, light and airy in Beck's hand as he set it down upon a table.

"It's half-full of bourbon," said Craig.

"I don't see anything inside," said Beck.

"Then shake it."

Beck picked it up, gingerly shook it.

"Hear it gurgle?"

"No."

"I can hear it plain."

Beck replaced it on the table. Sunlight spearing through a side window struck blue flashes off the slender container. It was the blue of a star held in the hand. It was the blue of a shallow ocean bay at noon. It was the blue of a diamond at morning.

"This *is* it," said Beck quietly. "I know it is. We don't have to look anymore. We've found the Blue Bottle."

Craig looked skeptical. "Sure you don't *see* anything in it?"

"Nothing... But—" Beck bent close and peered deeply into the blue universe of glass. "Maybe if I open it up and let it out, whatever it is, I'll know."

"I put the stopper in tight. Here." Craig reached out.

"If you gentlemen will excuse me," said a voice in the door behind them.

The plump man with blond hair walked into their line of vision with a gun. He did not look at their faces, he looked only at the blue glass bottle. He began to smile. "I hate very much to handle guns," he said, "but it is a matter of necessity, as I simply ***must*** have that work of art. I suggest that you allow me to take it without trouble."

Beck was almost pleased. It hid a certain beauty of timing, this incident; it was the sort of thing he might have wished for, to have the treasure stolen before it was opened. Now there was the good prospect of a chase, a fight, a series of gains and losses, and, before they were done, perhaps another four or five years spent upon a new search.

"Come along now," said the stranger. "Give it up," He raised the gun warningly.

Beck handed him the bottle.

"Amazing. Really amazing," said the plump man. "I can't believe it was as simple as this, to walk in, hear two men talking, and to have the Blue Bottle simply ***handed*** to me. Amazing!" And he wandered off down the hall, out into the daylight, chuckling to himself.

Under the cool double moons of Mars the midnight cities were bone and dust. Along the scattered highway the landcar bumped and rattled, past cities where the fountains, the gyrostats, the furniture, the metal-singing books, the paintings lay powdered over with mortar and insect wings. Past cities that were cities no longer, but only things rubbed to a fine silt that flowered senselessly back and forth on the wine winds between one land and another, like the sand in a gigantic hourglass, endlessly pyramiding and repyramiding. Silence opened to let the car pass, and closed swiftly in behind.

Craig said, "We'll never find him. These damned roads. So old. Potholes, lumps, everything wrong. He's got the advantage with the cycle; he can dodge and weave. Damn!"

They swerved abruptly, avoiding a bad stretch. The car moved over the old highway like an eraser, coming upon blind soil, passing over it, dusting it away to reveal the emerald and gold colors of ancient Martian mosaics worked into the road surface.

"Wait," cried Beck. He throttled the car down. "I saw something back there."

"Where?"

They drove back a hundred yards.

"There. You see. It's *him*."

In a ditch by the side of the road the plump man lay folded over his cycle. He did not move. His eyes were wide, and when Beck flashed a torch down, the eyes burned dully.

"Where's the bottle?" asked Craig.

Beck jumped into the ditch and picked up the man's gun. "I don't know. Gone."

"What killed him?"

"I don't know that either."

"The cycle looks okay. Not an accident."

Beck rolled the body over. "No wounds. Looks like he just—stopped, of his own accord."

"Heart attack, maybe," said Craig. "Excited over the bottle. He gets down here to hide. Thought he'd be all right, but the attack finished him."

"That doesn't account for the Blue Bottle."

"Someone came along. Lord, you know how many searchers there are...."

They scanned the darkness around them. Far off, in the starred blackness, on the blue hills, they saw a dim movement.

"Up there." Beck pointed. "Three men on foot."

"They must have..."

"My God, look!"

Below them, in the ditch, the figure of the plump man glowed, began to melt. The eyes took on the aspect of moonstones under a sudden rush of water. The face began to dissolve away into fire. The hair resembled small firecracker strings, lit and sputtering. The body fumed as they watched. The fingers jerked with flame. Then, as if a gigantic hammer had struck a glass statue, the body cracked upward and was gone in a blaze of pink shards, becoming mist as the night breeze carried it across the highway.

"They must have—*done* something to him," said Craig. "Those three, with a new kind of weapon."

"But it's happened before," said Beck. "Men I knew about who had the Blue Bottle. They vanished. And the bottle passed on to others who vanished." He shook his head. "Looked like a million fireflies when he broke apart...."

"You going after them?"

Beck returned to the car. He judged the desert mounds, the hills of bone-silt and silence. "It'll be a tough job, but I think I can poke the car through after them.

I *have* to, now." He paused, not speaking to Craig, "I think I know what's in the Blue Bottle.... Finally, I realize that what I want most of all is in there. Waiting for me."

"I'm not going," said Craig, coming up to the car where Beck sat in the dark, his hands on his knees. "I'm not going out there with you, chasing three armed men. I just want to live, Beck. That bottle means nothing to me. I won't risk my skin for it. But I'll wish you luck."

"Thanks," said Beck. And he drove away, into the dunes.

The night was as cool as water coming over the glass hood of the landcar.

Beck throttled hard over dead river washes and spills of chalked pebble, driving between great cliffs. Ribbons of double moonlight painted the bas-reliefs of gods and animals on the cliff sides all yellow gold: mile-high faces upon which Martian histories were etched and stamped in symbols, incredible faces with open cave eyes and gaping cave mouths.

The motor's roar dislodged rocks, boulders. In a whole rushing downpour of stone, golden segments of ancient cliff sculpture slid out of the moons' rays at the top of the cliff and vanished into blue cool-well darkness.

In the roar, as he drove, Beck cast his mind back—to all the nights in the last ten years, nights when he had built red fires on the sea bottoms, and cooked slow, thoughtful meals. And dreamed. Always those dreams of *wanting*. And not knowing what. Ever since he was a young man, the hard life on Earth, the great panic of 2130, the starvation, chaos, riot, want. Then bucking through the planets, the womanless, loveless years, the alone years. You come out of the dark into the light, out of the womb into the world, and what do you find that you really want?

What about that dead man back there in the ditch? Wasn't he always looking for something extra? Something he didn't have. What was there for men like himself? Or for anyone? Was there anything at all to look forward to?

The Blue Bottle.

He quickly braked the car, leaped out, gun ready. He ran, crouching, into the dunes. Ahead of him, the three men lay on the cold sand, neatly. They were Earthmen, with tan faces and rough clothes and gnarled hands. Starlight shone on the Blue Bottle, which lay among them.

As Beck watched, the bodies began to melt. They vanished away into rises of steam, into dewdrops and crystals. In a moment they were gone.

Beck felt the coldness in his body as the flakes rained across his eyes, flicking his lips and his cheeks.

He did not move.

The plump man. Dead and vanishing. Craig's voice: "Some new weapon..."

No. Not a weapon at all.

The Blue Bottle.

They had opened it to find what they most desired. All of the unhappy, desiring men down the long and lonely years had opened it to find what they most wanted in the planets of the universe. And all had found it, even as had these three. Now it could be understood, why the bottle passed on so swiftly, from one to another, and the men vanishing behind it. Harvest chaff fluttering on the sand, along the dead sea rims. Turning to flame and fireflies. To mist.

Beck picked up the bottle and held it away from himself for a long moment. His eyes shone clearly. His hands trembled.

So this is what I've been looking for, he thought. He turned the bottle and it flashed blue starlight.

So this is what all men *really* want? The secret desire, deep inside, hidden all away where we never guess? The subliminal urge? So this is what each man seeks, through some private guilt, to find?

Death.

An end to doubt, to torture, to monotony, to want, to loneliness, to fear, an end to everything.

All men?

No. Not Craig. Craig was, perhaps, far luckier. A few men were like animals in the universe, not questioning, drinking at pools and breeding and raising their young and not doubting for a moment that life was anything but good. That was Craig. There were a handful like him. Happy animals on a great reservation, in the hand of God, with a religion and a faith that grew like a set of special nerves in them. The unneurotic men in the midst of the billionfold neurotics. They would only want death, later, in a natural manner. Not now. Later.

Beck raised the bottle. How simple, he thought, and how right. This *is* what I've always wanted. And nothing else.

Nothing.

The bottle was open and blue in the starlight. Beck took an immense draught of the air coming from the Blue Bottle, deep into his lungs.

I have it at last, he thought.

He relaxed. He felt his body become wonderfully cool and then wonderfully warm. He knew he was dropping down a long slide of stars into a darkness as delightful as wine. He was swimming in blue wine and white wine and red wine. There were candles in his chest, and fire wheels spinning. He felt his hands leave him. He felt his legs fly away, amusingly. He laughed. He shut his eyes and laughed.

He was very happy for the first time in his life.

The Blue Bottle dropped onto the cool sand.

At dawn, Craig walked along, whistling. He saw the bottle lying in the first pink light of the sun on the empty white sand. As he picked it up, there was a fiery whisper. A number of orange and red-purple fireflies blinked on the air, and passed on away.

The place was very still.

"I'll be damned." He glanced toward the dead windows of a nearby city. "Hey, Beck!"

A slender tower collapsed into powder. "Beck, here's your treasure! I don't want it. Come and get it!"

"...and get it," said an echo, and the last tower fell.

Craig waited.

"That's rich," he said. "The bottle right here, and old Beck not even around to take it." He shook the blue container.

It gurgled.

"Yes, sir! Just the way it was before. Full of bourbon, by God!" He opened it, drank, wiped his mouth.

He held the bottle carelessly.

"All that trouble for a little bourbon. I'll wait right here for old Beck and give him his damn bottle. Meanwhile—have another drink, Mr. Craig. Don't mind if I do."

The only sound in the dead land was the sound of liquid running into a parched throat. The Blue Bottle flashed in the sun.

Craig smiled happily and drank again.

Dark They Were, and Golden-Eyed

The rocket metal cooled in the meadow winds. Its lid gave a bulging *pop*. From its clock interior stepped a man, a woman, and three children. The other passengers whispered away across the Martian meadow, leaving the man alone among his family.

The man felt his hair flutter and the tissues of his body draw tight as if he were standing at the center of a vacuum. His wife, before him, seemed almost to whirl away in smoke. The children, small seeds, might at any instant be sown to all the Martian climes.

The children looked up at him, as people look to the sun to tell what time of their life it is. His face was cold.

"What's wrong?" asked his wife.

"Let's get back, on the rocket."

"Go back to Earth?"

"Yes! Listen!"

The wind blew as if to flake away their identities. At any moment the Martian air might draw his soul from him, as marrow comes from a white bone. He felt submerged in a chemical that could dissolve his intellect and burn away his past.

They looked at Martian hills that time had worn with a crushing pressure of years. They saw the old cities, lost in their meadows, lying like children's delicate bones among the blowing lakes of grass.

"Chin up, Harry," said his wife. "It's too late. We've come over sixty million miles."

The children with their yellow hair hollered at the deep dome of Martian sky. There was no answer but the racing hiss of wind through the stiff grass.

He picked up the luggage in his cold hands. "Here we go," he said—a man standing on the edge of a sea, ready to wade in and be drowned.

They walked into town.

Their name was Bittering. Harry and his wife Cora; Dan, Laura, and David. They built a small white cottage and ate good breakfasts there, but the fear was never gone. It lay with Mr. Bittering and Mrs. Bittering, a third unbidden partner at every midnight talk, at every dawn awakening.

"I feel like a salt crystal," he said, "in a mountain stream, being washed away. We don't belong here. We're Earth people. This is Mars. It was meant for Martians. For heaven's sake, Cora, let's buy tickets for home!"

But she only shook her head. "One day the atom bomb will fix Earth. Then we'll be safe here."

"Safe and insane!"

Tick-tock, seven o'clock sang the voice-clock; *time to get up.* And they did.

Something made him check everything each morning—warm hearth, potted blood-geraniums—precisely as if he expected something to be amiss. The morning paper was toast-warm from the 6 A.M. Earth rocket. He broke its seal and tilted it at his breakfast place. He forced himself to be convivial.

"Colonial days all over again," he declared. "Why, in ten years there'll be a million Earthmen on Mars. Big cities, everything! They said we'd fail. Said the Martians would resent our invasion. But did we find any Martians? Not a living soul! Oh, we found their empty cities, but no one in them. Right?"

A river of wind submerged the house. When the windows ceased rattling Mr. Bittering swallowed and looked at the children.

"I don't know," said David. "Maybe there're Martians around we don't see. Sometimes nights I think I hear 'em. I hear the wind. The sand hits my window. I get scared. And I see those towns way up in the mountains where the Martians lived a long time ago. And I think I see things moving around those towns, Papa. And I wonder if those Martians *mind* us living here. I wonder if they won't do something to us for coming here."

"Nonsense!" Mr. Bittering looked out the windows. "We're clean, decent people." He looked at his children. "All dead cities have some kind of ghosts in them. Memories, I mean." He stared at the hills. "You see a staircase and you wonder what Martians looked like climbing it. You see Martian paintings and you wonder what the painter was like. You make a little ghost in your mind, a memory. It's quite natural. Imagination." He stopped. "You haven't been prowling up in those ruins, have you?"

"No, Papa." David looked at his shoes.

"See that you stay away from them. Pass the jam."

"Just the same," said little David, "I bet something happens."

Something happened that afternoon.

Laura stumbled through the settlement, crying. She dashed blindly onto the porch.

"Mother, Father—the war, Earth!" she sobbed. "A radio flash just came. Atom bombs hit New York! All the space rockets blown up. No more rockets to Mars, ever!"

"Oh, Harry!" The mother held onto her husband and daughter.

"Are you sure, Laura?" asked the father quietly.

Laura wept. "We're stranded on Mars, forever and ever!"

For a long time there was only the sound of the wind in the late afternoon.

Alone, thought Bittering. Only a thousand of us here. No way back. No way. No way. Sweat poured from his face and his hands and his body; he was drenched in the hotness of his fear. He wanted to strike Laura, cry, "No, you're lying! The rockets will come back!" Instead, he stroked Laura's head against him and said, "The rockets will get through someday."

"Father, what will we do?"

"Go about our business, of course. Raise crops and children. Wait. Keep things going until the war ends and the rockets come again."

The two boys stepped out onto the porch. "Children," he said, sitting there, looking beyond them, "I've something to tell you."

"We know," they said.

In the following days, Bittering wandered often through the garden to stand alone in his fear. As long as the rockets had spun a silver web across space, he had been able to accept Mars. For he had always told himself: Tomorrow, if I want, I can buy a ticket and go back to Earth.

But now: The web gone, the rockets lying in jigsaw heaps of molten girder and unsnaked wire. Earth people left to the strangeness of Mars, the cinnamon dusts and wine airs, to be baked like gingerbread shapes in Martian summers, put into harvested storage by Martian winters. What would happen to him, the others? This was the moment Mars had waited for. Now it would eat them.

He got down on his knees in the flower bed, a spade in his nervous hands. Work, he thought, work and forget.

He glanced up from the garden to the Martian mountains. He thought of the proud old Martian names that had once been on those peaks. Earthmen, dropping from the sky, had gazed upon hills, rivers, Martian seats left nameless in spite of names. Once Martians had built cities, named cities; climbed mountains, named mountains; sailed seas, named seas. Mountains melted, seas drained, cities tumbled. In spite of this, the Earthmen had felt a silent guilt at putting new names to these ancient hills and valleys.

Nevertheless, man lives by symbol and label. The names were given.

Mr. Bittering felt very alone in his garden under the Martian sun, anachronism bent here, planting Earth flowers in a wild soil.

Think. Keep thinking. Different things. Keep your mind free of Earth, the atom war, the lost rockets.

He perspired. He glanced about. No one watching. He removed his tie. Pretty bold, he thought. First your coat off, now your tie. He hung it neatly on a peach tree he had imported as a sapling from Massachusetts.

He returned to his philosophy of names and mountains. The Earthmen had changed names. Now there were Hormel Valleys, Roosevelt Seas, Ford Hills, Vanderbilt Plateaus, Rockefeller Rivers, on Mars. It wasn't right. The American settlers had shown

wisdom, using old Indian prairie names: Wisconsin, Minnesota, Idaho, Ohio, Utah, Milwaukee, Waukegan, Osseo. The old names, the old meanings.

Staring at the mountains wildly, he thought: Are you up there? All the dead ones, you Martians? Well, here we are, alone, cut off! Come down, move us out! We're helpless!

The wind blew a shower of peach blossoms.

He put out his sun-browned hand and gave a small cry. He touched the blossoms and picked them up. He turned them, he touched them again and again. Then he shouted for his wife.

"Cora!"

She appeared at a window. He ran to her.

"Cora, these blossoms!"

She handled them.

"Do you see? They're different. They've changed! They're not peach blossoms any more!"

"Look all right to me," she said.

"They're not. They're wrong! I can't tell how. An extra petal, a leaf, something, the color, the smell!"

The children ran out in time to see their father hurrying about the garden, pulling up radishes, onions, and carrots from their beds.

"Cora, come look!"

They handled the onions, the radishes, the carrots among them.

"Do they look like carrots?"

"Yes...no." She hesitated. "I don't know."

"They're changed."

"Perhaps."

"You know they have! Onions but not onions, carrots but not carrots. Taste: the same but different. Smell: not like it used to be." He felt his heart pounding, and he was afraid. He dug his fingers into the earth. "Cora, what's happening? What is it? We've got to get away from this." He ran across the garden. Each tree felt his touch. "The roses. The roses. They're turning green!"

And they stood looking at the green roses.

And two days later Dan came running. "Come see the cow. I was milking her and I saw it. Come on!"

They stood in the shed and looked at their one cow.

It was growing a third horn.

And the lawn in front of their house very quietly and slowly was coloring itself like spring violets. Seed from Earth but growing up a soft purple.

"We must get away," said Bittering. "We'll eat this stuff and then we'll change—who knows to what? I can't let it happen. There's only one thing to do. Burn this food!"

"It's not poisoned."

"But it is. Subtly, very subtly. A little bit. A very little bit. We mustn't touch it."

He looked with dismay at their house. "Even the house. The wind's done something to it. The air's burned it. The fog at night. The boards, all warped out of shape. It's not an Earthman's house any more."

"Oh, your imagination!"

He put on his coat and tie. "I'm going into town. We've got to do something now. I'll be back."

"Wait, Harry!" his wife cried.

But he was gone.

In town, on the shadowy step of the grocery store, the men sat with their hands on their knees, conversing with great leisure and ease.

Mr. Bittering wanted to fire a pistol in the air.

What are you doing, you fools! he thought. Sitting here! You've heard the news—we're stranded on this planet. Well, move! Aren't you frightened? Aren't you afraid? What are you going to do?

"Hello, Harry," said everyone.

"Look," he said to them. "You did hear the news, the other day, didn't you?"

They nodded and laughed. "Sure. Sure, Harry."

"What are you going to do about it?"

"Do, Harry, do? What *can* we do?"

"Build a rocket, that's what!"

"A rocket, Harry? To go back to all that trouble? Oh, Harry!"

"But you *must* want to go back. Have you noticed the peach blossoms, the onions, the grass?"

"Why, yes, Harry, seems we did," said one of the men.

"Doesn't it scare you?"

"Can't recall that it did much, Harry."

"Idiots!"

"Now, Harry."

Bittering wanted to cry. "You've got to work with me. If we stay here, we'll all change. The air. Don't you smell it? Something in the air. A Martian virus, maybe; some seed, or a pollen. Listen to me!"

They stared at him.

"Sam," he said to one of them.

"Yes, Harry?"

"Will you help me build a rocket?"

"Harry, I got a whole load of metal and some blueprints. You want to work in my metal shop on a rocket, you're welcome. I'll sell you that metal for five hundred dollars. You should be able to construct a right pretty rocket, if you work alone, in about thirty years."

Everyone laughed.

"Don't laugh."

Sam looked at him with quiet good humor.

"Sam," Bittering said. "Your eyes—"

"What about them, Harry?"

"Didn't they used to be gray?"

"Well now, I don't remember."

"They were, weren't they?"

"Why do you ask, Harry?"

"Because now they're kind of yellow-colored."

"Is that so, Harry?" Sam said, casually.

"And you're taller and thinner—"

"You might be right, Harry."

"Sam, you shouldn't have yellow eyes."

"Harry, what color eyes have *you* got?" Sam said.

"My eyes? They're blue, of course."

"Here you are, Harry." Sam handed him a pocket mirror. "Take a look at yourself."

Mr. Bittering hesitated, and then raised the mirror to his face. There were little, very dim flecks of new gold captured in the blue of his eyes.

"Now look what you've done," said Sam a moment later. "You've broken my mirror."

Harry Bittering moved into the metal shop and began to build the rocket. Men stood in the open door and talked and joked without raising their voices. Once in a while they gave him a hand on lifting something. But mostly they just idled and watched him with their yellowing eyes.

"It's suppertime, Harry," they said.

His wife appeared with his supper in a wicker basket.

"I won't touch it," he said. "I'll eat only food from our Deep-freeze. Food that came from Earth. Nothing from our garden."

His wife stood watching him. "You can't build a rocket."

"I worked in a shop once, when I was twenty. I know metal. Once I get it started, the others will help," he said, not looking at her, laying out the blueprints.

"Harry, Harry," she said, helplessly.

"We've got to get away, Cora. We've *got* to!"

The nights were full of wind that blew down the empty moonlit sea meadows past the little white chess cities lying for their twelve-thousandth year in the shallows. In the Earthmen's settlement, the Bittering house shook with a feeling of change.

Lying abed, Mr. Bittering felt his bones shifted, shaped, melted like gold. His wife, lying beside him, was dark from many sunny afternoons. Dark she was, and golden-eyed, burnt almost black by the sun, sleeping, and the children metallic in their beds, and the wind roaring forlorn and changing through the old peach trees, the violet grass, shaking out green rose petals.

The fear would not be stopped. It had his throat and heart. It dripped in a wetness of the arm and the temple and the trembling palm.

A green star rose in the east.

A strange word emerged from Mr. Bittering's lips.

"*Iorrt. Iorrt.*" He repeated it.

It was a Martian word. He knew no Martian.

In the middle of the night he arose and dialed a call through to Simpson, the archaeologist.

"Simpson, what does the word *Iorrt* mean?"

"Why that's the old Martian word for our planet Earth. Why?"

"No special reason."

The telephone slipped from his hand. "Hello, hello, hello, hello," it kept saying while he sat gazing out at the green star. "Bittering? Harry, are you there?"

The days were full of metal sound. He laid the frame of the rocket with the reluctant help of three indifferent men. He grew very tired in an hour or so and had to sit down.

"The altitude," laughed a man.

"Are you *eating*, Harry?" asked another.

"I'm eating," he said, angrily.

"From your Deep-freeze?"

"Yes!"

"You're getting thinner, Harry."

"I'm not!"

"And taller."

"Liar!"

His wife took him aside a few days later. "Harry, I've used up all the food in the Deep-freeze. There's nothing left. I'll have to make sandwiches using food grown on Mars."

He sat down heavily.

"You must eat," she said. "You're weak."

"Yes," he said.

He took a sandwich, opened it, looked at it, and began to nibble at it.

"And take the rest of the day off," she said. "It's hot. The children want to swim in the canals and hike. Please come along."

"I can't waste time. This is a crisis!"

"Just for an hour," she urged. "A swim'll do you good."

He rose, sweating. "All right, all right. Leave me alone. I'll come."

"Good for you, Harry."

The sun was hot, the day quiet. There was only an immense staring burn upon the land. They moved along the canal, the father, the mother, the racing children in their swimsuits. They stopped and ate meat sandwiches. He saw their skin baking brown.

And he saw the yellow eyes of his wife and his children, their eyes that were never yellow before. A few tremblings shook him, but were carried off in waves of pleasant heat as he lay in the sun. He was too tired to be afraid.

"Cora, how long have your eyes been yellow?"

She was bewildered. "Always, I guess."

"They didn't change from brown in the last three months?"

She bit her lips. "No. Why do you ask?"

"Never mind."

They sat there.

"The children's eyes," he said: "They're yellow, too."

"Sometimes growing children's eyes change color."

"Maybe *we're* children, too. At least to Mars. That's a thought." He laughed. "Think I'll swim."

They leaped into the canal water, and he let himself sink down and down to the bottom like a golden statue and lie there in green silence. All was water-quiet and deep, all was peace. He felt the steady, slow current drift him easily.

If I lie here long enough, he thought, the water will work and eat away my flesh until the bones show like coral. Just my skeleton left. And then the water can build on that skeleton-green things, deep water things, red things, yellow things. Change. Change. Slow, deep, silent change. And isn't that what it is up *there*?

He saw the sky submerged above him, the sun made Martian by atmosphere and time and space.

Up there, a big river, he thought, a Martian river; all of us lying deep in it, in our pebble houses, in our sunken boulder houses, like crayfish hidden, and the water washing away our old bodies and lengthening the bones and—

He let himself drift up through the soft light.

Dan sat on the edge of the canal, regarding his father seriously.

"*Utha*," he said.

"What?" asked his father.

The boy smiled. "You know. *Utha*'s the Martian word for 'father.'"

"Where did you learn it?"

"I don't know. Around. *Utha*!"

"What do you want?"

The boy hesitated. "I—I want to change my name."

"Change it?"

"Yes."

His mother swam over. "What's wrong with Dan for a name?"

Dan fidgeted. "The other day you called Dan, Dan, Dan. I didn't even hear. I said to myself, That's not my name. I've a new name I want to use."

Mr. Bittering held to the side of the canal, his body cold and his heart pounding slowly. "What is this new name?"

"Linnl. Isn't that a good name? Can I use it? Can't I, please?"

Mr. Bittering put his hand to his head. He thought of the silly rocket, himself working alone, himself alone even among his family, so alone.

He heard his wife say, "Why not?"

He heard himself say, "Yes, you can use it."

"Yaaa!" screamed the boy. "I'm Linnl, Linnl!"

Racing down the meadowlands, he danced and shouted.

Mr. Bittering looked at his wife. "Why did we do that?"

"I don't know," she said. "It just seemed like a good idea."

They walked into the hills. They strolled on old mosaic paths, beside still pumping fountains. The paths were covered with a thin film of cool water all summer long. You kept your bare feet cool all the day, splashing as in a creek, wading.

They came to a small deserted Martian villa with a good view of the valley. It was on top of a hill. Blue marble halls, large murals, a swimming pool. It was refreshing in this hot summertime. The Martians hadn't believed in large cities.

"How nice," said Mrs. Bittering, "if we could move up here to this villa for the summer."

"Come on," he said. "We're going back to town. There's work to be done on the rocket."

But as he worked that night, the thought of the cool blue marble villa entered his mind. As the hours passed, the rocket seemed less important.

In the flow of days and weeks, the rocket receded and dwindled. The old fever was gone. It frightened him to think he had let it slip this way. But somehow the heat, the air, the working conditions—

He heard the men murmuring on the porch of his metal shop.

"Everyone's going. You heard?"

"All going. That's right."

Bittering came out. "Going where?" He saw a couple of trucks, loaded with children and furniture, drive down the dusty street.

"Up to the villas," said the man.

"Yeah, Harry. I'm going. So is Sam. Aren't you Sam?"

"That's right, Harry. What about you?"

"I've got work to do here."

"Work! You can finish that rocket in the autumn, when it's cooler."

He took a breath. "I got the frame all set up."

"In the autumn is better." Their voices were lazy in the heat.

"Got to work," he said.

"Autumn," they reasoned. And they sounded so sensible, so right.

"Autumn would be best," he thought. "Plenty of time, then."

No! cried part of himself, deep down, put away, locked tight, suffocating. No! No!

"In the autumn," he said.

"Come on, Harry," they all said.

"Yes," he said, feeling his flesh melt in the hot liquid air. "Yes, in the autumn. I'll begin work again then."

"I got a villa near the Tirra Canal," said someone.

"You mean the Roosevelt Canal, don't you?"

"Tirra. The old Martian name."

"But on the map—"

"Forget the map. It's Tirra now. Now I found a place in the Pillan Mountains—"

"You mean the Rockefeller Range," said Bittering.

"I mean the Pillan Mountains," said Sam.

"Yes," said Bittering, buried in the hot, swarming air. "The Pillan Mountains."

Everyone worked at loading the truck in the hot, still afternoon of the next day.

Laura, Dan, and David carried packages. Or, as they preferred to be known, Ttil, Linnl, and Werr carried packages.

The furniture was abandoned in the little white cottage.

"It looked just fine in Boston," said the mother. "And here in the cottage. But up at the villa? No. We'll get it when we come back in the autumn."

Bittering himself was quiet.

"I've some ideas on furniture for the villa," he said after a time. "Big, lazy furniture."

"What about your encyclopedia? You're taking it along, surely?"

Mr. Bittering glanced away. "I'll come and get it next week."

They turned to their daughter. "What about your New York dresses?"

The bewildered girl stared. "Why, I don't want them any more."

They shut off the gas, the water, they locked the doors and walked away. Father peered into the truck.

"Gosh, we're not taking much," he said. "Considering all we brought to Mars, this is only a handful!"

He started the truck.

Looking at the small white cottage for a long moment, he was filled with a desire to rush to it, touch it, say good-bye to it, for he felt as if he were going away on a long journey, leaving something to which he could never quite return, never understand again.

Just then Sam and his family drove by in another truck.

"Hi, Bittering! Here we go!"

The truck swung down the ancient highway out of town. There were sixty others traveling in the same direction. The town filled with a silent, heavy dust from their passage. The canal waters lay blue in the sun, and a quiet wind moved in the strange trees.

"Good-bye, town!" said Mr. Bittering.

"Good-bye, good-bye," said the family, waving to it.

They did not look back again.

Summer burned the canals dry. Summer moved like flame upon the meadows. In the empty Earth settlement, the painted houses flaked and peeled. Rubber tires upon which children had swung in back yards hung suspended like stopped clock pendulums in the blazing air.

At the metal shop, the rocket frame began to rust.

In the quiet autumn Mr. Bittering stood, very dark now, very golden-eyed, upon the slope above his villa, looking at the valley.

"It's time to go back," said Cora.

"Yes, but we're not going," he said quietly. "There's nothing there any more."

"Your books," she said. "Your fine clothes."

"Your *llles* and your fine *ior uele rre*," she said.

"The town's empty. No one's going back," he said. "There's no reason to, none at all."

The daughter wove tapestries and the sons played songs on ancient flutes and pipes, their laughter echoing in the marble villa.

Mr. Bittering gazed at the Earth settlement far away in the low valley. "Such odd, such ridiculous houses the Earth people built."

"They didn't know any better," his wife mused. "Such ugly people. I'm glad they've gone."

They both looked at each other, startled by all they had just finished saying. They laughed.

"Where did they go?" he wondered. He glanced at his wife. She was golden and slender as his daughter. She looked at him, and he seemed almost as young as their eldest son.

"I don't know," she said.

"We'll go back to town maybe next year, or the year after, or the year after that," he said, calmly. "Now—I'm warm. How about taking a swim?"

They turned their backs to the valley. Arm in arm they walked silently down a path of clear-running spring water.

Five years later a rocket fell out of the sky. It lay steaming in the valley. Men leaped out of it, shouting.

"We won the war on Earth! We're here to rescue you! Hey!"

But the American-built town of cottages, peach trees, and theaters was silent. They found a flimsy rocket frame rusting in an empty shop.

The rocket men searched the hills. The captain established headquarters in an abandoned bar. His lieutenant came back to report.

"The town's empty, but we found native life in the hills, sir. Dark people. Yellow eyes. Martians. Very friendly. We talked a bit, not much. They learn English fast. I'm sure our relations will be most friendly with them, sir."

"Dark, eh?" mused the captain. "How many?"

"Six, eight hundred, I'd say, living in those marble ruins in the hills, sir. Tall, healthy. Beautiful women."

"Did they tell you what became of the men and women who built this Earth settlement, Lieutenant?"

"They hadn't the foggiest notion of what happened to this town or its people."

"Strange. You think those Martians killed them?"

"They look surprisingly peaceful. Chances are a plague did this town in, sir."

"Perhaps. I suppose this is one of those mysteries we'll never solve. One of those mysteries you read about."

The captain looked at the room, the dusty windows, the blue mountains rising beyond, the canals moving in the light, and he heard the soft wind in the air. He shivered. Then, recovering, he tapped a large fresh map he had thumbtacked to the top of an empty table.

"Lots to be done, Lieutenant." His voice droned on and quietly on as the sun sank behind the blue hills. "New settlements. Mining sites, minerals to be looked for. Bacteriological specimens taken. The work, all the work. And the old records were lost. We'll have a job of remapping to do, renaming the mountains and rivers and such. Calls for a little imagination.

"What do you think of naming those mountains the Lincoln Mountains, this canal the Washington Canal, those hills—we can name those hills for you, Lieutenant. Diplomacy. And you, for a favor, might name a town for me. Polishing the apple. And why not make this the Einstein Valley, and farther over...are you *listening*, Lieutenant?"

The lieutenant snapped his gaze from the blue color and the quiet mist of the hills far beyond the town.

"What? Oh, *yes*, sir!"

Lost Mars
The Unpublished Martian Stories of Ray Bradbury

BY MARC SCOTT ZICREE

A man peers through a hole in a wall.

"What do you see?" his companion asks.

"Wonderful things," Howard Carter replies, the first man to lay eyes on the Tomb of King Tutankhamen in millennia.

Key among that assemblage of royal bric-a-brac, a treasure among treasures, is a gleaming mask of gold and lapis, blind eyes and perfect lips.

The year is 1922. Soon enough, a young boy will see that mask. It will lodge in his mind and, in time, what once looked upon a kingdom will gaze out over a world.

The world of Mars.

We needn't name that boy, of course. It's Ray Bradbury, and the glinting cold object that held such power within its simulated cheek and brow was but one of a myriad magpie acquisitions that would coalesce into one of the greatest works in modern literature.

Most such creations share one thing in common: they leave us craving, in the words of Edward G. Robinson's Rico in *Key Largo*, "*More*!"

For whether we're talking about Luke Skywalker's Tattoine or Huck Finn's Mississippi or the decks of the starship Enterprise, the most compelling fictions create not just stories but whole worlds, the beguiling suspicion that just over that hillside lies an infinity of richness, that one could venture into that endless landscape and wander forever.

Bradbury himself was snared in just this way when he read *A Princess of Mars* at age twelve and promptly banged out a sequel on his toy typewriter.

And I was, too, when at thirteen I wrote my own sequel to *The Martian Chronicles.* In it, the last human left on Mars spends long years wandering the dead cities and dry seabeds, his life at last dwindling out beside an ancient canal, as the story concludes:

He lay back against an old cot and closed his eyes.

The Martians came to him, tens of thousands of them. All wore luxurious robes and metal masks. The Martians came.

The Last Man opened his eyes and looked around him. "I haven't much time, you know."

A Martian with a warm smile put his hand on the Last Man's shoulder. "We know. That is the reason we have come."

The Last Man died.

And with that, the ancient Martians went back to the old cities, their homes.

Everything was as it had been.

On that day in 1968, I had inhaled, devoured *The Martian Chronicles* and oh, how I longed for *more.*

Visit Ray Bradbury's home and you will find he is surrounded by everything he has ever known and loved—photos of his child self and his beloved Aunt Neva, autographs of movie stars he collected as a newsboy, mementoes of carnivals and magic shows, comic strips and long-ago matinees—as if his head had exploded and the contents shockwaved out around him.

His Martian tales are the same.

Bradbury's Mars is a synthesis, a blending of details, of the Mars of Wells and Percival Lowell and Burroughs, of Bradbury's dandelion and lightning bug boyhood in Waukegan, of the Arizona he encountered on his family's pilgrimage west, of the carnage and clamor and fine aspirations he found when he arrived in Los Angeles.

Love is prevalent in these stories—naturally, as it has formed the foundation of his life, and work, and art.

And death is there too, on a grand scale.

"I'd just begun to court Maggie," Ray told me of the formative period of these stories. "I met her in the bookstore, had a lot of dates with her, and we got engaged in May, 1946.

"That summer, they began to carry out the atom bomb experiments. At that time, various scientists were asked the question, 'What if the Earth catches fire? What if the atoms begin to inflame themselves, and you can't put out the fire, and the whole world goes up? Could that happen?' The scientists couldn't answer, they didn't know! They were just going to drop the bombs, and maybe the world will burn up!

"So in the middle of my love affair with Maggie, there was a terrible fear that I'd better love her as best I could, while there was time remaining. A lot of those stories came out of that summer of being really fantastically in love for the first time. Maggie was my first real great love affair, and I was twenty-six. It's all the more precious when the world you live in is so incredibly fragile."

Bradbury's Mars, with its crystal towers and whispering sands, its brooding canals, was—and remains—more real to me than many places in my own life, more real certainly than the actual Mars, with its desiccated landscape and pale thin air and life that may or may not dwell somewhere beneath its surface.

Often as I navigated through high school and college, got married and charted my course, I'd crack open *The Martian Chronicles* and idyll awhile there, taking a breather from this hectic, cacophonous life.

The stories, those marvelous stories—of the first four expeditions and the fates that met them, of the night meeting between man and Martian that was so like a dream, of elegant sand ships and garish hot-dog stands—those and their companion tales always remained the same. And whatever further marvels beckoned siren-like beyond the horizon or blew whispered promise on the back of my neck might be hinted at but could never be known.

Or at least, so I thought.

But with the passing decades, I discovered that the *Chronicles*, like Tut's storeroom, had an antechamber, a side room as large as the first.

And it too held wonders.

All the ungathered Mars stories, flung like golden coins throughout Ray's other collections.

And now finally the rarest of all, brought out into the sun—Bradbury's unpublished tales of Mars.

Here then are these scattered children, these strays and wayfarers, lulled out of the dark and silence, assembled at last. And although these scatterlings are of a piece with the stories contained in the *Chronicles* and Ray's other published Mars stories, they offer up their own bouquet, subtle yet different, redolent of yearning and melancholy and loss.

The Disease, Dead of Summer, The Martian Ghosts, Jemima True, They All Had Grandfathers, The Wheel, The Marriage.

At times showing their bones and rough edges, the stories are breathtaking, original, fresh. Not merely covering old ground, they fill in the blanks, shed light into black corners. Earthmen appear as Martian ghosts, prostitutes ply their trade, Halloween is celebrated on Mars, a saloon is erected, the first civilian dies on Mars, a Martian girl and an Earthman marry.

But bare description does little to illumine their majesty and the unique music that is Ray's alone. Phrases that surprise and catch our breath summon it best, as in "The Disease," that equally-tragic sequel to the *Chronicles*' tale of the First Expedition, where the dying Yll looks over at his already-dead wife Ylla "like a small dark craft rising and falling upon the tidal mist of the room" and reflects how "we shot the dream and killed it, and now the dream is killing us." Or the heat of Mars in "Dead of Summer," "the time of dust rising in a warm spice upon the air...leaving the boats deposited like brittle leafs, upon the steaming dry channel." Or Jemima True, "with

hair like an explosion of sunlight, and skin like snow." Or the hard sweet truth of Nowhere Town in "They All Had Grandfathers," where "it's always the working men come first, the runaways and hard men," those who hear the siren call and know "it's in every man, early or late, sometimes he just wants to travel light."

And finest and most delicate of all, the marriage of Captain Samuel Pace and his Martian bride Elta and their world inbetween, where "half the trees are elm trees and half the trees shed fire, and half the children have blue eyes and half the children have eyes like melted gold." In its microcosm, "The Marriage" encapsulates the entire sweep of Ray's Martian saga; the alien becomes familiar, the familiar alien, until they are mixed together and all division lost. This is the American story, with Ray the inevitable offspring of it, and ourselves as well.

Here's Ray's advice on how to read this entire book, and by extension these long-lost stories: "Dive in! A book is a lake, a pond, an ocean. Dive in, swim out, and drown. Read the whole collection. Don't linger. Keep moving, and you'll wind up with 'Dark They Were, and Golden-Eyed.'

"And when you finish reading this book, you may wake up in the middle of the night feeling that something's happened to your eyes..."

A grand sojourn, a safari to new, far yet familiar terrains. "We have met the enemy and he is us," goes Walt Kelly's oft-quoted refrain. But whom we encounter in this distant mirror held close are ourselves as both enemy and friend, through the lens of Bradbury's love and his concern, for he has long feared the obliteration of both future and past.

Fifty years on and more, we are staggered, not by how outdated these stories might seem, but rather how immediate and relevant they are to our times.

The threat of nuclear annihilation is still with us, though subtler and thus less contained, diseases new and old ravage the world, and everywhere the delicate and vulnerable confront being ravaged and ground under heel.

But through all of this, Ray—even in his darkest moments—comforts us that the blade of grass inevitably thrusts up through the concrete...and that, over time, our finest, most sensitive, most *Martian* selves will prevail.

Part Three

The Screenplays

For Ray Bradbury

RICHARD MATHESON

In September of 1950 when I was twenty-four years old, newly graduated from the journalism school at the University of Missouri, with all of two short-short stories published, I wrote a letter of appreciation to Ray Bradbury; I have no idea how I got his address, I probably sent the letter to the magazine which had just printed his latest story. It might have been THE FIREMAN in *Galaxy*, a novelette which, in time, was expanded by Ray into his masterpiece novel FARENHEIT 451.

It was a letter from a fan to an admired professional.

To my astonishment—and awed gratitude—Mr. Bradbury (he was Mr. to me then and for some time to come) responded to my letter with an extended letter of his own in which he expressed his pleased surprise at my story, THIRD FROM THE SUN, even to the point where we had both written an almost identical scene regarding the protagonist's wife and her distress about locking the front door of the house when her husband, her two children and her were about to escape from a perilous life, her family by traveling through time, my family through space.

Most important to me, of course, was his praise and encouragement for my writing and his generous assessment that, as he saw it, I had a successful career ahead of me—as long as I made sure to approach my work with honesty and genuine emotion, never succumbing to "commercial" surrender.

I still have that letter. I had it made into a plaque which hangs on a wall in my house, a constant reminder of how overwhelmed I was to receive it from a writer with the skill and much-deserved fame of Mr. Bradbury, encouraging my ambition to write with a similar integrity.

It was a wonderful way to begin a career.

For more than half a century, I have known Ray Bradbury as an immensely talented author and a kind, sensitive human being whose encouragement meant the world to me in 1950—and still does. His friendship and generous praise of my work has added a permanent enrichment to my life.

While it is (disappointingly) true that Ray and I have had a limited social contact—mostly at book signings and conventions—I nonetheless believe that I know him intimately in the one way a writer can most accurately know another. Through his or her writing.

Ray's stories, novels, articles and scripts are set forth in maddeningly simple terms, all wonderfully precise. We who have aspired to do likewise could only wonder how he can be so lovingly poetic, then, when he chooses, so knife-edged and cutting,

scaling heights of story skill, every word counting as it should but so rarely does in the work of other writers.

Ray Bradbury possesses a key to the fantasy lock which opens the door to story magic.

I cannot recall ever reading such magnificent prose from other writers. Prose so intense, so droll, so frightening in such an entertaining way. Like all aspiring writers, I tried to capture that inimitable style. We all did. In vain. Ray Bradbury is impregnable in his literary fort.

All of these qualities are found in THE MARTIAN CHRONICLES. Sadly, I agreed, years ago, to pen a six-hour television mini-series based on Ray's novel for NBC. The result was not too satisfying to Ray—or to me. His own adaptation of individual stories from the CHRONICLES in his self-owned Canadian TV series was more satisfying to both of us.

But, of course, no matter how excellent a television adaptation may be, the total satisfaction of THE MARTIAN CHRONICLES lies between the covers of this book. Here the stories are presented in all their purity, all their excitements and delights.

In the world of parapsychology there is a phenomenon known as "Remote Viewing." The talented psychic "sees" different locations and is able to describe those locations in detail.

The way Ray Bradbury has described Mars as he sees it.

Now you can see it too. Happy reading.

Richard Matheson
September 2005

The Martian Chronicles

1963 SCREENPLAY

FADE IN:

A date.

A title.

July 11th, 1999

"SOMETHING NEAR"

FADE TO BLACK.

FADE IN:

The dead sea bottom of a strange dry desert world.

Far away the sun has just set behind low blue hills.

Twilight moves over the dry dead sea bottom. There is a moment of immense stillness. The CAMERA stands quietly looking at all this sand and ancient silence, from which the heat of the long day is shimmering.

And then at last a voice speaks, quietly.

THE STORY TELLER
It was an evening in summer upon the placid and temperate planet Mars.

Now the CAMERA begins to move as if the wind blew it over the sea bottom. Here and there it comes upon the remains of some ancient craft buried in the sand. Then again it touches at the strewn fragments of a statue or an old dock.

And as the CAMERA drifts, blown, the sand darkens. Stars begin to fill the sky. Over the low blue hills far away a white disc lifts slowly up into view.

The moon is above the hills. We gaze at it for a moment and then: a second light appears further over as a second white disc, smaller, comes to view.

THE STORY TELLER
The twin moons rose over much that was familiar and much that would soon be strange.

We see the two moons drifting on the sky; an incredible pair.

THE STORY TELLER
Twice blessed, the land grew double shadows that spread and made twin darknesses in cities as old as night itself...and moved in dry canals where only dust flowed in a quiet river of Time...

We see the double shadows mix in ruins of ancient villas and towns, some buried in the heart of the sand seas, some left at the rim of wharfs when the seas dried up.

The CAMERA drifts like a tumbleweed blowing in the dry stone channels of the empty canals, to lift up over stone spillways, from the rims of which cascàde waterfalls of dust.

THE STORY TELLER
...to find far newer places where yet things lived.

Free of the dead canal, the CAMERA moves into the darkening blue hills.

It prowls over empty rock, dead boulder, dry avalanche of shale and along a vast cliff base, a wall of blank-faced stone.

And moving along this flat blank surface, the CAMERA drifts round a corner to reveal:

A mask. It hangs upon the night air, the color of moonlit silver, beautifully embossed and contoured.

The mask moves. It lifts up.

The eye slots gaze dark-empty at the sky.

And now we hear the breathing of something within the mask.

THE STORY TELLER
And those of this world who lived behind the masks smelled change upon the air, sensed a weather of sad, wild, new things blowing over the land. It was almost there. It could almost be touched. It was coming near.

The mask motions now this way and that in the wind.

The eye slots scan. We hear a sound, a vague musical hum, which rises, fades, rises again.

Then the mask vanishes. The man turns abruptly to hurry off.

The CAMERA moves with him to look upon a beautiful villa town below, beginning to light itself softly with silver lights in silver pillars as the fountains rise upon themselves to pulse and shimmer.

THE STORY TELLER
Yet it was an ordinary evening...In a hundred towns, the same ordinary things were happening.

A flock of children run by with strange toys in their hands, all silver-masked.

One boy freezes, as if called. The others run on, murmuring.

The boy stands on a small rise where he can see his street, his house, the town, and beyond, the far hills where other towns, like his, are lit against the dusk.

But now, disquieted, the boy searches for his disquiet. We hear the disturbed music as if it came from the blowing air or from the mind of this boy, suddenly uneasy.

A toy drops from his opened hand.

It strikes the stones.

He slowly bends to pick it up.

And doing so, looks at the sky.

Where the stars look back.

The boy breaks and runs to join his laughing friends far ahead.

He flashes by a house.

Inside which, at a softly bubbling table of silvery lava, a woman, masked, stands preparing the evening dinner.

THE STORY TELLER
It was an ordinary evening...

Now the WOMAN, disturbed turns her head to see:

THE ghosts of blue dust which blow by the door.

She pauses a moment. Then, quickly, almost compulsively, she falls to work, putting meats down into the lava table, as if work would make her unmindful of dread. As the meat drops into the lava table, the lava troubles itself. A stir of whispering shifts across the silver pool, reflecting night sky, shivering the stars.

AND we are outside again in the blowing, changing weather, near the library of pillars which glow softly in the dusk.

Within the library, under a clear glass roof, and near an open portal, some old men, similarly masked, are reading...that is, they are touching their fingers to the surfaces of books which are covered with harplike threads, with capillary hairs like the metal tines on a music box, but infinitely small. These pringle and sing softly as they are strummed, telling ancient tales, speaking old wisdoms in strange high indistinguishable syllables, as the masked men listen.

One OLD MAN, reaching to take down a vibrant scroll, a capillary book, hesitates; for the wind has blown a silken drape and sift of dust into the library.

This OLD MAN looks out at the street and the sky. He hears a different music, a vibration which warns of dooms and dreads gathering in a new climate.

And turns away, busies himself, his hands fumbling, playing at the book which he seizes and strums to cover that other hum, that other sound, that other ominous music.

CUT TO: a pillared house above the others, on a hill. And for the last time the STORY TELLER repeats.

THE STORY TELLER
...An ordinary evening...

Within the house, two shapes upon a bed.

One shape lifts up in shadow.

A woman's hand touches down to lift an exquisite mask.

And, mask to face, the woman goes to stand among the pillars. She looks to the sky:

A hand comes out of the dusk behind her. A man's hand. His mask hovers near. And standing there behind her, he allows himself to be bound to her. She holds his hands tight, as if needing protection.

THE STORY TELLER
And yet, again and again in the midst of summer, the sky seemed filled with winter birds, with cries of far-traveling.

CUT TO: a great silken bloom of colored sail. It thunders in the wind.
The sails rush away. Beneath them now we see: a ship that sails on sand, a craft as delicate as a crescent moon fallen to earth and rushing over the dead sea bottoms.

The sandship whispers, skimming, riding the ancient dust.

It vanishes off.

We see people boarding other sandships.

And people walking on the paths across the dry sea.

THE STORY TELLER
And in this strange weather, in this time that felt like a time of going-away and perhaps never coming back, there was need of company.

A vast fleet of sandships sail whispering under the double moonlight, drawn by:

A light in the hills, and a sound of instruments playing.

THE STORY TELLER
–and need of music.

CUT TO: THE CAMERA passes along row after row of masks and sees, passing, hands moving to hold hands, hands moving to touch and hold elbows as if everyone at the same instant were commanded by need to do so.

THE STORY TELLER
And in not one but a hundred well-lit places, in a suddenly winter-seeming night, ten thousand people gathered to warm their mutual souls.

We see now that we are in an enormous amphitheatre.

The audience grows still and looks down at:

A stage where a most peculiar orchestra of most peculiar instruments starts to play a very peculiar music indeed.

A woman steps forward, masked, to the front of the stage.

The orchestra ends its introductory measures.

The audience waits.

The orchestra plays.

The woman takes her position.

The long lines of beautiful masks wait, attentively.

The orchestra diminishes, quiets.

The woman sings softly, a strange wordless tune, very beautiful, but very alien.

The audience listens, their gold coin eyes bright and filled with admiration.

The orchestra plays.

The woman sings.

The orchestra falters and looks faintly disturbed, as if they might play some different tune.

The woman falters imperceptibly, and goes on. But now suddenly she sings no unfamiliar, no Martian song, instead, in clear well-phrased English she sings:

THE WOMAN
...drink to me...only...

She stops.

The people in the audience sit taller or lean forward.
The woman, with great difficulty, sings haltingly.

THE WOMAN
...with thine eyes...

She stops again.

The musicians wait, confused.

She turns to them, helplessly, her eyes strange and fearful behind the mask.

The orchestra, as if to give her courage to go on, takes its beat from one amongst them and plays music. But no sooner has it begun then, it is strange, also.

We hear the next line of the song, which runs, "or leave a kiss within the cup and I'll not ask for wine."

The audience stirs.

The orchestra, listening to itself, freezes.

The audience half rises.

The woman stares at the orchestra.

One man behind his mask mutters frantically.

They all look around. The audience murmurs.

The WOMAN touches her throat.

She stares at the sky.

Which looks back with a million stars. Perhaps one of the stars moves in an arc; the tiniest motion.

The audience looks around and up, whispering.

The audience grows quiet.

The orchestra grows quiet.

The woman gains her reserve. She nods. They begin. It is the Martian music and song again for a few bars, then:

THE WOMAN
...or leave a kiss within the cup...

The musicians leap up, trembling.

The audience stands as if a storm had swept the amphitheatre.

The woman whirls this way, and that.

Her mask is flung clattering to the stage.

Masks tumble in the amphitheatre aisles.

The rest of the audience stands, shocked.

The woman, her back turned, on the stage, stands swaying, her hands to her throat. Someone retrieves her mask, hands it to her. She puts it on. Her mouth works.

The audience, standing, waits.

The musicians, standing, wait.

She utters one musical word.

THE WOMAN
...wine...

The musicians drop their instruments.

The audience disperses swiftly.

We see the woman turn and run from the stage as before a great dark storm.

The musicians circle out over the apron, lost in the crowd.

As masks fall, crushed under bare and sandaled feet.

Many with masks, moving, look up.

At the blowing night sky of stars, the billion stars which tremble with anticipation.

The people hurry.

CUT TO: the town in the hills: the children run in the alleys.

One small girl stops, masked, to play with a delicate golden web of strings like a harp she carries on a wand.

THE LITTLE GIRL (In English)
Higgledy-piggledy, my fat hen.

Other children nearby jerk about to stare at her.

THE LITTLE GIRL, astonished, finishes.

THE LITTLE GIRL
...She lays eggs for gentlemen!

And clasps one hand to her throat, the other to her mouth.

As the children stare.

And her toy web breaks in the wind.

The children leap back from her as if burnt.

They whirl, run, vanish.

The little girl stands stricken, panicked, whimpering.

THE LITTLE GIRL
...old mother Hubbard...went to the cupboard...

She breaks and runs.

Doors shuttle shut.

Pillars, catching moonlight, revolve in.

The streets are empty.

The library chimes and closes up to a silent flower-shape.

The torchlight flickers.

The amphitheatre is empty.

The sandships sail swiftly away.

The deserts are empty.

In the various houses, in darkness, women cover the bubbling lava cauldrons.

People stand and wait, listening, alert, masked, their gold eyes strange and muted with some unknown terror.

The children wait, crouched in their pillared rooms.

The hills wait.

The canals sift dust and wait.

And at last, we look at the stars and see one small light begin to move.

The landscape is flushed with sudden raw white-blue-red explosion light. The sound of thunder comes much later.

A bright object falls from the sky, like a star.

And again fire appears from beneath this far object.

Which changes the color of the sands watering in the canals.

We watch the bright metal object drift down through the night sky.

The "star" falls down beyond the hills, vanishing from sight.

The desert, the hills, the lands, the valleys are silent.

In the town, some younger men in silver masks appear. They pantomime to each other.

They move stealthily to the edge of town.

They look down into the foothills, waiting.

CUT BACK TO, a rise near where the "star" has fallen.

The CAMERA is in motion moving toward a rise. We hear a faint sound of electricity, of machinery drawing near.

The CAMERA moves. The sound grows louder.

And suddenly, over the rise comes a giant striding robot spider, all radio-broadcast antennae, all television-viewing eye, all mysterious equipments that might electrically touch, look, taste and know this world on which it now prints its motioning six robot feet.

The CAMERA follows for a little while until we have seen the "monster" close and know it for a visitor from another world set down free, of itself, to hunt out information. It ticks, it whirs, it clicks, it speaks to itself in far voices which we cannot understand.

And now it moves off and off up into the hills, straight for that town which we have known, and for the people in masks, the Martian people we have met and seen at their tasks and their humours in the last few minutes.

The CAMERA slows to a standstill to watch the "spider," the robot, stride off up away, its hums and ticks fading, vanishing into the villas, and the town.

Silence. The stars shine.

THE STORY TELLER
Thus something very old was now visited by something terribly New. And so the Chronicles of Mars began.

FADE OUT

FADE IN:

A date. A title.

JULY 14th, 1999

"THE VISITORS"

FADE OUT.

FADE IN:

The raw hot Martian sands of the dead sea-bottom at noon.

The hills bake in the sun.

The far horizon shimmers.

The sun, a white hot disc, burns in the center of the sky. But then, after a moment, the CAMERA perceives a tremor. The sun trembles. There is a faint roar. Then–an explosion. The sun moves. The solar rim flurries out tongues of fire. The blazing disc descends straight down into the CAMERA, roaring louder.

The hills shake.

Avalanches shower from cliffs.

Dust storms swirl hot across the desert.

THE STORY TELLER (during the above)
And the sun rose upon a new day, and gathered to it miracles of air, strange rains, mythological fires. And that sun at noon did move and fall from out the sky to touch upon the waiting land.

The "sun" roars down into the CAMERA, like a huge fireball falling with increased fury.

The sand of the desert melts and turns to glass. In a thousand strewn bits of glass we see reflected: the falling sun, the roaring fireball.

The flame drops and fills the CAMERA. Everything is fire and thunder now.

Then, abruptly, we cut the fire. We cut the thunder. And find ourselves staring at the dumb brute underside of a rocket engine.

The CAMERA fixes on this for a moment and then slowly slides out from under, along the huge quiet machineries. It moves out and away so as to look at the full length of the rocket itself which sits on the dead sea-bottom quietly.

Then the CAMERA moves up along the entire length of the still ship, listening to its interior machineries whir, tick, hum, listening to the metal snap and settle as it cools.

And during this we hear:

THE STORY TELLER
And the visiting Sun, gone cold, spoke tongues to itself, whispered, sighed, muttered, talked storms of electric power, sought knowledge, and, great Beast, grew still....

Great ports slide open. Strange television eyes and antennae extrude themselves, glowing.

Other vents pop wide and there is a suctioning of air, a nattering click-tic of computers.

Many varieties of machines slide to view and spin through mysterious motions with hums and sizzlings of power.

Then, at last, a greater port opens, with a vast clangor.

A steel ladder hisses down. It rams the soil.

CUT TO: dusk in the hills. Far away, like a small seed lost in the desert, we see the rocket.

The first moon rises, as before.

The second moon rises. There is a moment of stillness.

Then, in the twilight sky between the pale moons, we see two tiny flecks of darkness. Two vinegar-gnat motions hover there like bats come forth at night. Then–lights flash. The dark shapes rush forward.

And straight on into the camera two black figures, faceless, armoured, shining, plunge. We have only a moment in which to make out arms, legs, bodies, helmets. But the glass helmets reflect light. We can see no faces behind the glass. Then, the two figures collide head-on with the CAMERA, filling it.

QUICK CUT TO: the figures run away, in a reverse shot from the CAMERA over the landscape.

The CAMERA flies with them, briefly, now above, now below, in a series of quick shots in which we cannot quite tell what we follow. Perhaps these are immense dark birds, or so they seem, or still further monsters from the monster rocket machine already visited.

And now in a plummeting run, the CAMERA looks down at the rushing desert and sees there, now soaring low, now high, dipping into valleys, running over hills, the twin shadows of these flying shapes.

The shadows flash over the buried ruins of old sea-towns.

The shadows flick over dry canals and bridges.

The CAMERA rushes with the shadows, intent on following the swift flight of the dark birds as seen below on the flowing landscape.

Until at last the CAMERA hovers. The shadows hang suspended, whispering, above a familiar dead town.

The shadows drift down, sighing.

The boot of one man crunches in the dead ruins.

The boots of a second man, CLOSEUP, touches to his own shadow. Dark comes down to meet dark.

The boots grind the dust upon the ancient stones.

Tall shapes loom, and then a huge hand glides down, gloved.

It brushes the dust away.

Beneath lies the face of a mythological animal.

A second glove fills the sky, drifting down, to remove the glove so that the hand, thinner, more finely shaped, can touch at the hidden mosaics, brushing.

Then both shapes rise from their shadowed crouch. They tower. They stride off among the echoes, loud among so much that is quiet.

The CAMERA moves with them as these armored, insect-like creatures walk steadily, their heads turning, carrying on their backs, the compact jet-units that enable them to fly.

Their helmets reflect the empty ruins. We see no faces behind the glass, for an inner protective shield makes a mirror over which the town itself moves and runs in silvery reflections.

The second man stops, a courtyard, immense and shifting with dust, can be seen reflected on his visor.

Now, as we watch, a mosaic of tiles shaped into a stone tapestry of fragile creatures, long dead beasts, appears and disappears as the wind weaves and re-weaves the gentle dust.

One helmet turns to watch the wind at work. Suddenly, a face appears, as an inner glass lid slides up out of sight. We see the face of CAPTAIN WILDER.

The dust powders over the vast courtyard now shining forth the stream of mosaic beasts, now drowning them in sand.

Walking, the Second Man's boot strikes something.

The second helmet visor, reflecting the lost ruins, tips up its inner protective shell, leaving only the outer helmet glass. Now we see the face of JEFF SPENDER who, in awe of this scene, pale, and silent, looks down at:

A mask which lies at his feet.

WILDER speaks on the inter-helmet radio, quietly, gazing around.

WILDER
It looks like we're a thousand years too late.

SPENDER hardly hears as he kneels to retrieve the mask.

WILDER walks on through the tides of rivering dust, across the mosaic tiles. He climbs a few stone steps and stands surveying the scene.

SPENDER, the exquisite silver mask held in his hands, looks from it to the fallen pillars, the buried statues and crumbled stones.

The wind sighs in the ruins. We hear SPENDER's VOICE.

SPENDER'S VOICE
So we'll no more a-roving
So late into the night,
Though the heart be still as loving,
And the Moon be still as bright.

Briefly, we see SPENDER's face as his lips move.
The double shadows lean out from worn pillars near WILDER who, spelled himself, listens, watchful, calm.

SPENDER'S VOICE
Though the night was made for loving...

In the mosaic, perhaps SPENDER sees now two figures that might be man and woman, masked, standing together.

SPENDER
And the day returns too soon.
Yet we'll no more a-roving
By the light of the moon.

The mosaics cover themselves as the wind goes back to sleep.

WILDER stands, silent.

SPENDER looks at the mask in his hands, then hooks it to his equipment belt, turns, and walks slowly away.

The mask rattles softly on his belt as he walks.

MOVING, WILDER looks down.

As does SPENDER, arriving near him.

There lie the familiar spider-tracks of the mechanical robot in the soil, fast being eroded by the wind.

The CAMERA lifts to show the pattern of prints leading off across the low hills.

WILDER and SPENDER start along the pattern and have moved a short distance when they hear something. They look up.

From the distant hills, a faint screaming of voices can be heard.

WILDER and SPENDER freeze for a moment, listening. Then WILDER jerks his head in the direction of the sound. They leap up. They fly.

We CUT AHEAD in a series of gigantic CAMERA leaps, over the hills where we see a new town nestled in ridges.

Then with another leap the town is closer, the screaming louder, and we see, for the first time, a wildly flashing light.

With the final, third leap, the CAMERA jumps forward into the midst of the town, the flashing light, the high and uncontrollable screaming. The CAMERA comes down into a confined plaza where we see: instantly:

The robot crawler, the mechanical Probe, running amok. It rushes now this way, now that, spreading ruin.

CLOSEUP we see that the robot has somehow damaged itself. It runs now on five legs instead of six. It carries one of the steel legs up, as if wounded.

Its television eyes, CLOSE, flicker and flash, one of them fading. And from it now comes the screams we have heard.

Its various equipments, its electric mandibles for touching, turning, and examining Mars, twitch, clutch, and gape.

Vents on the sides and back of the robot pop open, snap shut. The robot spins in a new direction, darts off, flashing a great bright beam of light ahead.

The light strikes a statue.

Too late, the robot pulls up as it smashes the statue base.

The statue tilts and falls, shattering on the mosaic walk.

The robot crayfishes backward.

It whirls, flicking its light beam over:

Cracked walls. Shattered pillars. Broken fountains.

It spins round.

Its light stabs the air to transfix:

SPENDER and WILDER flying in, hovering, above.

WILDER and SPENDER look down, like moths held in the dark air by a great needle of light.

And, in reverse, we see the robot scuttle off below.

As WILDER and SPENDER swoop down.

The spider rushes across the plaza, shrieking its strange high wails.

Pistols out, the two men plunge, soar down.

The Machine ricochets off buildings, screaming. It whirls. It backs off, spins, eludes them.

They brake, circle, and pursue. Straight on, WILDER flies. He fires once. The shot cracks and shatters the robot's braincase.

WILDER and SPENDER hover and settle down by the machine.

The screams cut off. The robot sinks slowly. Its legs unspider themselves. THEN, IN ONE final motion, it falls down dead.

The two men look slowly up from it to this new environment, this place where the robot has brought them.

The town is familiar. We saw it days ago and knew its population. Now in the double-moonlight its towers soar, its pillars shine with stars. It is incredibly lovely, with its sense of space, air, light, and motion, with its ever-changing fountains which pulse fire and green jets of luminous gas.

SPENDER is filled with the quiet beauty of the place.

But WILDER, gone cold, examines the town, sees the beauty, yes, but notes the ruin that their Robot has spread:

The broken statues, the cracked fountain rims, the torn mosaics.

The wind shifts in a tide of whispers at their feet. They look down at:

A sea of dark autumn leaves, or things that look like leaves, which tumble and circle round the plaza and through every street of the town.

WILDER snaps on his helmet radio. He speaks, quietly, but crisply.

WILDER

Red alert. All men stand ready. Emergency. Distribute weapons. Investigating town. Signs of immediate intelligent life. Robot machine found and shut off. Has caused damage. May have frightened inhabitants of this place. Hostility possible. If our radio cuts off, do not attempt rescue. Repeat: no rescue. Board rocket and take off. Repeat: take off.

A new swirl of wind blows the dark leaves about their feet.

SPENDER, seeing this, comments.

SPENDER
Captain...those leaves...where did they come from?

They look around.

SPENDER
...there are no trees.

WILDER moves briskly to the dead robot, and yanks out one tape cartridge.

WILDER
Let's move out.

SPENDER (walking slowly)
Whoever was here...they're gone. Don't you feel it?

WILDER lets the feel of the city sink in on him.

A faint strumming chime turns them, alert.

SPENDER moves toward a near building.

WILDER follows, murmuring to his helmet radio.

WILDER (faint: on radio)
Reconnaissance: town. Reconnaissance: building.
Entering building.

They pass through a pillared door into the library.
And here among the pillars is the library of books which sing when touched gently.

SPENDER looks and sees:

THE LIBRARY floor where, strewn, fallen, whispering, singing, books lie everywhere.

CLOSEUP, one book sings softly as WILDER, his gun ready, comes to stand over it, still speaking quietly on the radio.

WILDER (on radio, faint)
Inside building. No signs of life. Perhaps library.
Perhaps musical conservatory.

WILDER crouches to touch the pages, which sing more loudly as his fingers stroke the quilled surface.

And around and about the books on the floor a soft blowing of autumn leaves, black motions, spin and settle.

SPENDER has one of the books in his hands now. The pages turn without his touching them, tissue thin, light as spider-webs. Voices sing from the pages like small ghosts.

He hangs the book back upon a pillar. Instantly, its quiet song stops.

The two men move out into the town again, and see:

The dead robot lying in the middle of the plaza.

WILDER and SPENDER step in through the pillars of yet another dwelling.

The lava table still bubbles its luminous fluids nearby.

The two men stand by the table, their faces lit with the fire of the lava. They look at the cooking implements nearby. They vanish back away.

And stand at the vast doorway of a bedroom.

A long low wide bed lies just beyond.

There are dim shapes upon the beds, beneath a gossamer coverlet.

WILDER bends and throws the coverlet back.

In the moonlight we see the fragile imprint of two slender bodies curled there upon whiteness.

SPENDER comes slowly around the bed to look down.

Now, as they watch, the wind blows what is left of these two people from the bed in small black flakes, leaving only a faint skeletal imprint behind, and two silver masks which lie abandoned where they fell.

The leaflets blow.

The two men see:

The wind take the dark leaves out into the street to join with the others tumbling by.

Now WILDER and SPENDER walk in the streets, circling the plaza.

And from every pillared archway the black leaves whisper and fly.

Within small entranceways, strewn shapes can be seen.

In large rooms, in crystal pillared houses, yet other shapes lie upon other beds.

And the two men walk in a dry riverbed of black leaves which never cease turning upon themselves.

Until they come again to the robot in the center of the plaza.

WILDER bends by the robot to brush a handful of the dark autumn leaves into a medical test kit, the lid of which he snaps shut. The slight snap makes SPENDER jerk and move.

SPENDER yanks forth the various tape-cartridges, the data-process packets, pulled out of the dead robot.

WILDER extracts a final tape-cartridge from its electrical slot.

SPENDER hangs one of the small packets from his belt.

Where the silver mask stirs in a slow pendulum as he brushes it with his quick hand, working.

SPENDER stops the mask swinging. He holds the remaining cartridges as if unable to move.

WILDER nods, and hovers in the air. The gust from his propulsion-pack stirs up the dark leaves in the vast plaza.

It is not WILDER's action, but the leaves themselves, and what they mean, leaping on the mechanical wind, that propels SPENDER, puts him in motion.

They fly up. The wind seizes the leaves which, sucked after in a wild whirlpool of double-moonlight, seem a swarm of bats attacking and beating with dry wings at the fleeing men.

SPENDER, wordless, flails his hand to ward off the harmless flutter and flick of dry death. He soars.

WILDER soars.

THE TOWN glides away, lost, below.

The robot Probe lies dead, abandoned.

The two fight free of the leaf-swarm, break out into air made cool and bright with stars.

The distant rocket gleams in the night.

They fly away toward that place.

DISSOLVE.

DISSOLVE IN:

The distant rocket by night. Beneath it is what appears to be a great transparent jellyfish. Inside the body of this gelatinous growth the men of the rocket are enclosed like organs within a creature, each functioning, each in motion. The double-moons are setting in the sky, and we only see the rocket and its plastic encampment beneath because of the moonlight. The CAMERA prowls in upon the scene.

And finds SPENDER alone by the edge of the canal outside the encampment, standing by a great radar radio infra-red device. He stands motionless, his face pale looking out at:

The far towns, one dead a thousand years ago, the second dead a matter of some forty hours ago.

The first moon goes down behind the mountains.

SPENDER's face is shadowed.

The second moon goes down.

And only SPENDER's eyes shine in the utter dark.

The CAMERA moves past him and passes through the skin of the plastic tenting and finds the men asleep among murmuring or silent machines, medical testing units, computers, etc.

We see the lone watchman seated by his television scanners wearing infra-red goggles, looking at four screens which move and scan the four directions constantly, whining.

Nearby, yet another series of machines pulse quietly in the sleeping night as the CAMERA moves over them. The Watchman glances at these, which cues the CAMERA to slide over the gently beeping recorders. We see, one after another, the names of the members of the crew on small brass plates beneath oscillating viewers that show their

respiration, blood-pressure, and heartbeat as we pass. The night encampment is all electric whisper and soft thud of heartbeat as we glide through.

And as the CAMERA catches at each name on its separate plate beneath an alert machine:

LUSTIG
WILDER
HINKSTON
SPENDER
PARKHILL
CHANCE
HATHAWAY

We cut to the sleeping men and hear each one's separate and distinct heartbeat softly thudding in the night.

And glide on to find WILDER, in his own separated and enclosed cubicle within the camp, seated among tapes and small computer machines, dictating, in a quiet voice, the events of the day. A small, shaded light burns beside him as we approach and circle him and listen, as he glances at developed photographs, turns over computation cards, and scans strangely symboled tapes.

WILDER
...left ancient town at 5:11 hours...touched down in second town 5:14 hours...having located missing and malfunctioning robot-probe device...in a civilized Martian community where signs of life were immediate. We found the robot machine, crippled, perhaps from its encounter with members of the Martian community, perhaps from mechanical fallibility. As for the town...it had been visited by a contagion, a plague. Cause of the Contagion: bacteria introduced into the air of Mars by our own mechanical robot Probe. The robot before launching from our ship was thoroughly checked and decontaminated by Spender, archaeologist-in-charge. Nevertheless, our bacteria have destroyed a large part, perhaps all, of the immediate life on Mars. The bacteria: varicella. Or in the vernacular: chickenpox.

He pauses, shuts off the tape, and sighs, rubbing his eyes, getting his senses together again before going on.

The men sleep in the camp. Their heartbeats sound.

We see their names on the pulsometers, we hear their life pulse.

WILDER exhales slowly and speaks, ironically.

WILDER
...chickenpox...has killed a native population. A child's disease on Earth has proved to be a devastating Plague here. As a result, I have given orders that until further notice, all crew members must wear full armoured uniform, plus oxygen helmet. What our bacteria did to the Martians, their bacteria, if breathed, could do to us. Meanwhile, we have hopes...

But the CAMERA by now has pulled back out of the cubicle, glances a final time at the sleeping men, hears their heartbeats recorded, looks at the oscillographs jump, and passes through the plastic skin of the infra-red lit encampment. WILDER is lost to sight. His voice fades. The camp dwindles.

SPENDER is arrived at, by the edge of the canal. We see his dim shape in the night.

The Martian mask turns dangling upon his belt.

His hand, dead-idle, touches the mask, gingerly, stroking over it with a fire tremoring.

His eyes stare at:

The far hills and dead towns.

His eyes stare.

The far towns lie silent.

His hand touches the hung silver mask, the beautiful artifact of a civilization long lost.

SPENDER hesitates, then touches a switch on his helmet.

The glass front of his helmet, hissing, slides completely up out of sight. We see his face, his profile, sharply revealed to the open air, the cold night winds of Mars.

He shuts his eyes, holds his breath a long moment.
Then he opens his eyes and drinks deep, gasping, of the air. He takes three or four deep breaths, and exhales.

As he does so, we FADE TO BLACK.

FADE IN:

A date.
A title.

July 15th, 1999

"HOMECOMING"

DISSOLVE TO:

DISSOLVE TO:

A morning mist, through which only faint gleams of the rocket can be seen.

THE CAMERA moves in upon the early morning camp as the light grows brighter. It prowls among the sleeping men.

The oscillographs beat the slow slumbrous pulses of the quiet men,

THE STORY TELLER
And so on that first night on the planet Mars, the children of Space laid themselves down in the great silence, took comfort from the sound of their own heartbeats, and slept.

At the machines, the watchman, HINKSTON, has himself gone to sleep.

We pause at the oscillograph which bears WILDER's name on a brass plate under it. Far away, a rooster crows. The heartbeat speeds up, then slows.

CUT TO: WILDER, asleep. The rooster crows again.

Again his heartbeat shows a sudden jump.

WILDER rouses himself, listening, and looks around. The men sleep calmly. WILDER relaxes, gets up, moves out to touch and wake HINKSTON. But—the rooster crows again.

All the oscillographs murmur and leap softly at the same instant. WILDER scans them.

The men are stirring.

WILDER turns to look out beyond the plastic skin of the gelatinous bubble.

The mist is thick, but shadows drift out there, amidst filterings of sunlight. The cock crows again.

WILDER moves toward the airlock door.

The men rouse slowly.

WILDER opens the airlock door.

Mist strays into the bubble.

The men are on their feet now and see:

WILDER, CLOSEUP, who hears the rooster crow even more clearly. He steps outside.

Seeing this, the men move toward him.

WILDER, outside, stands listening in the thick mist; as the men gather behind him. They wait.

The rooster crows a final time.

Followed by the slow tolling of a school bell far off in the fogs of morning. The bell fades.

One by one the men edge out, unaware of each other, each separated to himself, listening,

WILDER hears a single C chord struck on a piano somewhere, a mere suggestion of musical sound. He starts to walk.

The men are now drawn, each in turn, by various faint sounds.

Far out in the mist they hear a waterfall of children's voices at play. The crack of a baseball on a bat. A burst of voices crying: run, run, safe, safe!

And the men walk off, one by one, into the cloudy air.

Last of all, hesitant, PARKHILL vanishes in the mist.

We move with the men in a series of silent SHOTS, through the blowing fog.

The CAMERA glides with SPENDER who hears a dog barking miles away. He heads toward it.

WILDER, walking alone, looks up at:

A bouncing sound. A ball strikes once on an unseen roof above, then plummets down.

To roll along mist-clung grass.

WILDER glances down, bends slowly, picks up the ball, and looks around at the brightening sky.

The mist is blowing away.

An animal shape is seen ahead on a green lawn.

CUT TO: WILDER taking a last step to look at:

A metal deer standing alone on a vast meadow.

His hand reaches out to tap it. It gongs softly.

At which: the mist blows more swiftly away.

Revealing houses to left and right.

And apple trees in full-flowered snow-bloom to left and right.

The houses tower their cupolas in the bright sky.

More trees appear everywhere as the fog disperses.

CUT TO: A swift series of shots in which we see the faces of the seven men walking steadily through the lifting mist, quickening their pace to the sounds of horses' hooves clopping somewhere, noon whistles blowing dimly, a police whistle being blown faintly, a telephone ringing softly and far away, a lawnmower cutting grass in some unseen lot.

CUT TO: WILDER, walking, as the mist draws off ahead of him. It rolls itself up like a soft carpet to reveal rolling lawns, wondrous gardens, freshpainted Victorian houses, flashing windows, birdcages singing on porches, geranium pots spilling bright flowers from porch rails, windcocks humming on mansard roofs.

The sun glides in the trees, not only with the motion of the men but we can see that the morning advances swiftly on its own terms, the sun races toward noon.

And from the houses above, looking down, we see the long line of men advance out of what might have been an orchard of apple trees. They stride on an endless lawn of summer, like strangers wandering some fabulous golf course all rolling green forever, save that here on the spread of lush turf are houses, a few streets, sidwalks, and the men advance in a long line, two hundred feet separating each from the others. They no longer see each other. They only look ahead or up.

And the CAMERA hovers, suspended, from housetop to housetop, looking down as the men amble across the handsome fields under the blossom-snowing trees and walk far out into the open.

The men look ahead, up and around, in a series of quick cuts.

Looking up, intercut, we see the high passing cupolas. Light flashes from stained-glass Victorian windows.

The sun rides over and fixes at blazing noon.

And we see the men below, looking out from within cupola windows, seeing them tinted blue, red, or lemon by the colored panes.

SPENDER hears a dog barking more clearly, and quickens his pace.

CHANCE, at the edge of a lush alleyway which leads off into thick growths of oak, elm, and maple, sees a rusted railway track, overgrown with marigolds. Down that track he hears a whistle, a locomotive bell, a chuff of steam. He jogs off down that track into green deeps of railroad country.

HATHAWAY sees, far away, a bandstand from which come faint echoes of instruments tuning up. A drum beats. HATHAWAY, to that beat, begins to hurry off.

HINKSTON, walking, alert, feverish, hears: the pok! and again pok! sounds of a tennis ball hitting racquets.

There, on the near horizon, people as white as snow, costumed, play tennis, their shouts gone dim under a sea of summer wind.

HINKSTON jogs off toward that white motion and that lovely sound.

LUSTIG has come upon: a hopscotch-marked sidewalk which he follows along to a litter of baseball equipment on a lawn, which leads him to a fence. Then: squeaks and squeals. He glances swiftly up.

Above the fence-top can be seen a line of bright flapping fresh dried clothing being yanked and snatched into a latticed porch.

LUSTIG's face is flushed with excitement.

He follows along, drawn by the laundry as it travels and vanishes, zips into the porch drawn by plump, sturdy woman's hands.
LUSTIG stops as he sees:

Almost immediately, a small rug furled out and hung over the line. The woman, humming, cannot be seen within the latticed porch, strung with grape ivy and tapestried with golden bees busy touching at the blue grapes. The hands vanish.

Footsteps.

LUSTIG moves along with the sound, looking up at the open airing windows. He hears an oven door open.

A moment later, a huge apricot pie, latticed, is set to air in an open window. We cannot see the woman's face. We only see the hands put the pie down. The hands vanish.

LUSTIG stares, and moves up.

The pie is beautiful and aromatically steaming.

The footsteps go through the house. LUSTIG, excited, moves with them. A front screen door opens. A voice calls.

THE VOICE
Leonard. Leo. Len. Come help! Leo? Leonard!

But by the time LUSTIG has reached the side of the porch the footsteps have gone off the porch. As he rounds the porch he sees:

A flash of skirt go round the far end of the porch.

The CAMERA runs with him along the front of the porch, past the green fountains of delicate fern, to reach the alley path on the far side of the houses down which the footsteps have gone. He hears his name a final time: Leonard!

Then a great heartbeat, thumping; fills the wind.

LUSTIG moves along the path, breathing hard, almost gasping with excitement, drawn by the strange thumping beat. The CAMERA glides with him.

Until LUSTIG emerges into the backyard where various rugs are hung on lines. But the greatest carpet of all, vast as an elephant, Byzantine in the splendor of its designs and colors, hangs in the center of the yard. Behind it, someone wields a wire racquet, banging the carpet with great thumps.

As if it were his own heartbeat, half fearful, half filled with delight, LUSTIG advances upon that throbbing, elephantine carpet, behind which the hidden woman works.

LUSTIG stops. His voice is a half hopeful whisper.

LUSTIG
...Grandma...?

The beating stops. The wire racquet, poised in the sky, slowly drops down behind the rug.

LUSTIG steps to one edge of the cliff of carpeting. He peers around the edge.

An oldish woman looks back at him, slightly exasperated.
LUSTIG breaks forward, mouth open, but stops.

For she has briskly handed him another beater. She hits the carpet again. She waits and looks at him. She hits the carpet twice more until he gets the idea. Then, with a will, he falls to work. He bangs the carpet a fierce blow. In the middle of this fierce upfling and downfling of beaters, he looks over at his Grandmother and smiles.

She smiles back.

He gives the carpet a great blow. CUT TO:

WILDER, alone in the town, as far as we can see, walking steadily to the rhythm of the distant rug being beaten. But now another sound is heard. Faintly, a piano plays the first note of BEAUTIFUL OHIO. WILDER quickens. The piano goes back and plays the first two notes of BEAUTIFUL OHIO. And then the first three notes. And then the first four notes. Then silence.

The trees wash in green tides around WILDER.

He looks ahead.

Where a pure white house stands at the top of a slight rise at the end of a block, set in a small garden territory, by itself.

And again, walking more swiftly, WILDER hears the first six notes of BEAUTIFUL OHIO. A pause. Then the first eight notes. Then the first 12 notes.

WILDER sees:

That white house, nearer. A bay-window, and in the open airing window, a woman seated at an upright piano. She begins to add chords to BEAUTIFUL OHIO.

WILDER breaks into a jogging trots and we CUT from him to that house, each time nearer, as the piano plays BEAUTIFUL OHIO this time without stopping, all the way through, chorded and full, accompanied by the sound of the summer wind in the town, WILDER'S rhythmic pound on the sidewalk, the far beating of the wire racquets against a carpet. And now, easy and light as a boy, WILDER cuts across the lawn, and the CAMERA runs with him. The music is louder. The house very near.

The sun tilts overhead. The sun drifts as easy as WILDER.

The CAMERA, shooting up at the sky past WILDER, running with him, sees the sun outpace him and sink toward the West, but he does not see or care, his eyes are fixed to:

The bay-windows, the woman, the piano.

And in one long ceaseless flow of CAMERA, WILDER is across the last bit of lawn, bounds up the steps, runs across the porch and not knocking, throws wide the door, runs into the hall, along the hall, into the living room and stops. There is the piano and the woman, her back turned, playing the song in harmony.

WILDER can only stand swaying a moment, his eyes incredibly bright and almost wet.

The woman plays, sensing his presence, but not turning. We stay with her as he walks slowly up behind her and the piano music is loud and sweet and going on forever.

He lifts his hands, pauses, and puts them over her eyes in an old gesture.

Beneath his fingers, her mouth smiles. She speaks one word, quietly.

THE WOMAN

...son?

And her hands move on with the tune.

He sits on the bench beside her. He dares not look at her.

She does not dare look at him.

He puts his hands on the keys.

Their four hands interweave, in motion.

And looking straight ahead, WILDER AND his MOTHER finish out the tune, their eyes bright with tears.

CUT TO: SPENDER, jogging easily. A dog barks somewhere.

A dog is racing toward him over the mile-long hill of summer, yipping ecstatically.

SPENDER runs, leaving most of the houses behind.

The dog darts in great circles, finally zeroing madly in on SPENDER who shouts.

SPENDER
Skip!

The dog leaps.

The dog ricochets off SPENDER's chest with one joyous yelp, bounces off in a flip like an acrobat and scurries on, barking, wonderfully insane, full of conniption fits.

SPENDER shouts, and stops.

For at the edge of the green, on a hill where a small woods begins, a YOUNG MAN has appeared. His voice calls faintly.

THE YOUNG MAN
Skip!

SPENDER breaks into a full tilting run.

The dog races ahead toward the YOUNG MAN.

SPENDER runs.

The dog runs, barking. The sound of the rug beating and the sound of the piano have long since blown away. Now we hear the simple air passing, and the simple pattern of SPENDER's running on the grassy earth, the CAMERA pacing him, moving in on him, moving away from him.
THE YOUNG MAN waits up by the edge of towns on a dust-path among trees.

The sun, molten, drifts swiftly into those green-gold trees and it is indeed late afternoon, cooling toward fine summer twilight.

SPENDER leaps ahead.

The dog leaps, yelping in the blowing silence.

Flying through the air...

The dog ricochets off the YOUNG MAN, strikes earth, rockets back toward SPENDER, the CAMERA with him on one swift jump and return.

And by the time SPENDER has reached the younger man, this brother JIM, why JIM is already running at a good pace. As SPENDER pulls up and they go along, the

brother does not even look over but smiles ahead, as if confident and pleased at being recognized and run with.

SPENDER
Jim!

JIM
Beat you to the pump!

JIM takes off, ahead.

SPENDER, not to be outdone, leaps after.

The dog bounds, barking, between.

JIM races; SPENDER follows, slowly pulling up.

The trees rush over in green streams.

Sunlight flecks and darts in violent butterflies of light on JIM's tanned cheeks.

Sunlight and shadow scuttle over SPENDER's panting face.

We see them CLOSE, we see them far, as they leave the edge of town and tread Indian dustpaths easily. There is room for two to pace each other here where the trees thicken.

Where trees, above, running, crowd out the incredible blue sky and the incredible golden light of late afternoon.

We see them run weaving a way through maples, oaks, elms.

And break out in a glade.

And jog swiftly, almost arm in arm, beginning to laugh.

Jim looks over the shouts.

JIM
Hey!

SPENDER
Hey!

And a house lies ahead in a meadow surrounded by deep green grass, and wild flowers, near a ravine.

The grass flies under.

Their feet tread up a golden pollen of bumblebee-humming dust.

They flash by.

They leap a fence.

The dog frolics, barking.

JIM
Beat you hands behind the head!

He runs lacing his hands behind his head. Laughing, SPENDER does likewise.

JIM
Beat you turning in circles!

Still hands behind head, running, JIM turns in circles, but paces SPENDER, who must, of course, do likewise.

JIM
Beat you the last part running...backwards!

JIM turns around and runs backward SPENDER does the same, shouting out great gusts of laughter, as the CAMERA runs with them, the trees fly over, the dust flies up, the dog barks,
the house is near, the pump near.

And running backward, trip simultaneously over a log.

The sky tilts.

They fall straight over backward.

And down, striking soft deep grass.

They land rolling on their backs, try to rise, laughing, but, one leg up, their knees sink, they give themselves over to delicious tiredness.

They collapse and lie wondrously exhausted, knocking heads, elbows, knees.

They roll over, laughing. They strike each other on the arms, as men and boys will, then give up striking.

They lie upon their backs.
They look up, mouths wide, eyes wide with hilarity.

And the sky is blue.

And clouds race over.

And the wind fills the green trees.

And the green-gold shadows dance on their joyous faces.

And they grow quiet. And SPENDER feels tears blink to his eyes. He turns his head.

In a rainbow prism, turned to a God by this quirk of bright and radiant light, his brother looks back at him, panting easily, all happy.

And SPENDER says, half shout, half whisper.

SPENDER
Brother. You're alive!

THE BROTHER
Damn right! We are alive!

And is on his feet, against the sky, with the green trees washing over him and the sky blue and the clouds white and racing like great horses on an eternal and never-ending track.

He reaches down, grinning.

And in one soaring swooping pull, yanks SPENDER to his feet, and in that motion ducks his head, yelling, pushing SPENDER's head down with one hand, reaching with the other.

An iron pump-handle jumps.

Clear spring water gushes from an iron spout.

SPENDER is gladly, yellingly drenched in water which pours about his face, off his nose, around his laughing, gasping mouth, plastering his hair.

JIM bends and his head is glistered with water which turns gold. They both laugh, spluttering.

And see their hands dripping molten gold.

For the sun has sunk steadily, we watch it dream and glide all gold behind the trees.

The facades of the town are fired pink gold.

The windows shout gold! A thousand windows take fire.

The roofs are gold-brick, gold slate, gold weathervane, lightning rod, gold tile, and gold shingles!

And the sun goes down.

And the sky is the color of a great cool plum.

In a dozen backyards, on porches or in alleys, a dozen fine dogs chew bones, eat plates of food.

In a dozen backyards, cats do the same.

And both, Intercut, are watched eating to the sounds of eating from the houses, laughter, pianos, victrolas, radios, poured wine, poured lemonade, the clutter of dishes.

Bang, a door slams. The dogs vanish under porches.

Bang! The cats vanish like wafted feather-plumes.

The sky is a very dark black-blue plum indeed.

And a great Earth Moon rises upon the town.

And in all the houses separate parties are going on. We hear records playing similar slow tunes from every side as we move over the town.

The CAMERA prowls the strewn remains of a fabulous banquet table at WILDER's house. We see twelve chairs pushed back from dishes set to feed an army. In mid-table lies a ruined turkey, and now the CAMERA turns to the far end of the room which is curtained with a dark rainstorm of crystal beads beyond which figures waltz to a phonograph record. We watch their shadows and find, among others, the figure of WILDER dancing with his mother.

From various sights along the length of raining curtain we peer in at the dancers in candlelight until at last in the midst of a small thin orchestra playing BEAUTIFUL OHIO the MOTHER breaks through the curtain, flushed, patting her hair, perspiring, laughing. WILDER follows in good spirits.

MRS. WILDER
No, no. Stay. I'll just clean up the dishes.

WILDER
I'm an old hand. I insist.

And they move along separate sides of the table, gathering the used plates. She goes into the kitchen.

WILDER follows and puts down the plates, thoughtfully, and watches her scraping food into the sink. She pretends not to notice.

WILDER goes back out. We can see him from the kitchen pause at the piano and touch the keys to make some of the notes of BEAUTIFUL OHIO. MRS. WILDER looks out, and stops what she is doing.

WILDER looks at the town, and wanders, distracted, through the room, touching the chairs. He goes into the hall and stands by the screendoor gazing out at the night.

MRS. WILDER, in the kitchen, hears the screendoor open and shut. The CAMERA follows her as, face calm and only vaguely concerned, she goes to the screendoor.

There is WILDER, on the porch, surveying the town.
WILDER senses her presence, but does not turn.

He reaches up to touch the cluster of Chinese crystals fixed to the porch ceiling. They tinkle and flash out swarms of fish-light which swim in schools along the dark grotto above.

WILDER
This house. My great-grandfather's? Must be a hundred years old. I lived here one summer when I was twelve.

He gazes at the town, now this way, now that.

WILDER
And my uncles, my aunts, my cousins. And you. You're just as you were forty years ago.

He turns. She has opened the screen and stands looking at him, her face warm and beautiful, her words quiet but full of emotion.

MRS. WILDER
Yes, and isn't it nice, isn't it enough we're together for one night again, all of us, and a perfect night, and so much happiness you want to cry?

He wants to believe. She guesses his thought.

MRS. WILDER
Do you fear...something evil is here?

WILDER waits, searching her face.

She touches his chin with her fingers.

MRS. WILDER
It's not. I promise.

He cannot but touch her cheek, glad of her presence.

But before they can speak again, a small firefly-light flashes on, distantly, between them.

Both turn to look out beyond, across the street.

There, in the summer night, is a high single telephone pole on top which is an arc-light which throws a dusty illumination down upon a street corner. A match flame flickers.

Leaning against the pole, quietly watching the town, smoke idling from his mouth, we see a man.

WILDER's eyes widen.

THE CAMERA cuts swiftly down to find: SAM PARKHILL. He blows out the match.

WILDER, seeing him there, moves uneasily forward.

WILDER
Sam Parkhill...

MRS. WILDER, beside him, speaks with concern, after a long moment.

MRS. WILDER
Why is he alone? Has he no friends?

WILDER muses on that lonely figure under the light.

WILDER
He was raised in an orphanage. I suppose you never get over that. No, no friends.

MRS. WILDER
I would invite him in...

WILDER
But, he...

MRS. WILDER (finishes for him)
He couldn't come.

They look down at the man on the corner.

The moths tap and flutter on the high arc-light tin shade, gonging it softly with a lone and tiny sound.

PARKHILL eyes that house where WILDER is.

And would turn away but stops at a sound.

Out of the dark at the front of the house and now crossing the sidewalk, a woman moves.

PARKHILL waits.

The woman is walking in the street, holding something.

PARKHILL squints, faintly uneasy.

MRS. WILDER approaches and slows, a dish of ice cream in her hand.

PARKHILL waits, silently.

She holds out the dish.

PARKHILL looks at it a long moment, and then examines her face.

Her face is calm, warm, and patient.

PARKHILL drops his cigarette and steps on it.

She waits.

And at last he holds out his hand. She puts the dish in it.

They look at each other.

She goes back across the street and vanishes in the dark.

He waits until the door shuts, then looks at the ice cream. He sniffs it. He touches it with one finger. He touches it with another. He looks underneath the dish. He touches the spoon. He licks a dab off his finger. He dabs it again with his finger and licks that. Showing no emotion, he dips in the spoon. He turns it over, then eats the bite, holds it like a mild poison in his mouth, swallows it. Then he turns and walks off, eating, away from the light. We hold for a moment by the lamp-pole with the moths and the dark.

Then the CAMERA paces PARKHILL, eating slowly thoughtfully, as he tours the town in the dark night, passing houses, looking in at:

CHANCE on a front porch, his relatives around him all talking warm, laughing in the dark. We see cigars moving like fireflies. We hear rockers rocking.

PARKHILL glances swiftly on to see:

LUSTIG and his family, through a great window, finishing a late dinner.

HINKSTON and his relatives, through a parlor window, pouring homemade wine, lifting glasses in a toast.

A skyrocket goes off. PARKHILL sees:

HATHAWAY on a front lawn with his relatives among Venusian fire-fountains, and sparklers, as an aerial bomb jumps up, explodes high, and everyone goes "Ah!"

The fire fades on PARKHILL's face. The town clocks strike a late hour. He finds himself in the center of the town square and climbs the empty bandstand in the middle of which he turns in a circle watching the lights go out in all the houses, one by one.

His foot clatters something. He bends to pick up a baton, to turn it in his hand among the empty folding chairs. We hear a brief whisper of HOT TIME IN THE OLD TOWN TONIGHT which fades to GIVE ME A JUNE NIGHT in slow waltz

time, and a single piano playing BEAUTIFUL OHIO, all of which die into silence as PARKHILL sees the lights fading.

He finds he still has the ice cream dish in his hand. It is empty. Looking at the houses, he gives the dish an idle lick with his tongue. A last light flicks out.

CUT TO: an aerial view of the town. We pass over rooftops, trees, lonely streets, in silence.

Above the woodlands the crickets sound. Ahead we see SPENDER's wonderful old sprawling and comfortable house limned against a magnificent sky of stars.

The CAMERA moves in on SPENDER's house, and lifts up to the third story cupola window, to the bedroom where SPENDER and his brother JIM are asleep in the summer night. The CAMERA dissolves into the bedroom which is decorated with old pennants, trophies, ship-models out of a college Past. SPENDER and JIM are asleep in separate old brass beds, the only light in the room coming from a single telephone pole arc-light outside, and a filtering of illumination from the moon.

The CAMERA looks first at the sleeping JIM, and then moves on to find SPENDER, moving uneasily on his bed. Faintly, we hear a rustling whisper from outside in the night.

SPENDER sits up suddenly, not knowing where he is. He touches the brass headboard. He glances at the walls, and over at JIM asleep. He listens. The dry whisper continues like a moving tide.

SPENDER rises and we see that he has not undressed to sleep, but has simply remained in uniform and taken off his boot-shoes. Now, strangely apprehensive, he puts on the boots quickly, and stands.

Moths flurry at the summer-dark screen.

The great arc-light lantern dances on the wind a hundred feet away, swarming with moths.

The moth-light flickers and shadows the room.

SPENDER moves to the window, drawn by the immense whisper. He looks down.

At a tide of leaves which prowl and roam under the single arc-light below. The leaves swarm dry over the grass. In thousands they rustle like a legion of terrible crayfish over the night earth.

SPENDER turns, from the window. He looks at:

The back and shoulders of his sleeping brother.

Quietly, SPENDER MOVES toward the door.

JIM sleeps calmly, moth-light shadowing his cheeks.

SPENDER PASSES THE BED.

JIM sleeps.

SPENDER nears the door.

His hand drifts out on space, toward the doorknob. Beyond the arm and hand we can see JIM's face, eyes closed. But, his lips move:

JIM
Jeff?

SPENDER stiffens, hand on the door.

JIM, eyes closed, goes on:

JIM
You all right?

SPENDER waits.

SPENDER
Yes. Just thirsty.

JIM says nothing more. The moth shadows jump on his calm face.

SPENDER opens the door and goes out.

In the hall, moonlight lies everywhere in a great house of many rooms, the doors open and airing to the summer heat. SPENDER moves along, pausing, listening, looking to each side and back at the bedroom.

At the top of the stairs, he looks at the displays of pennants and baseballs and trophies which line the wall going down.

The CAMERA and SPENDER go down the stairs. He pauses now and again to listen to the sounds of the old house.

Above, amidst sighs and creaks of wood, moths tap at the windows which light the stairwell.

SPENDER touches one of the pennants marked with the name of a high school, turns it back, replaces it, and moves down to where he can look at:

The whole lower floor of the sleeping house, everything in its place.

SPENDER listens. The house murmurs its wooden beams.

SPENDER steps the rest of the way down and the sound of those autumn leaves arrest him again.

A few leaves fly up and whisk against the clear glass panes of the front door.

The leaf shadow patterns SPENDER's pale face. He jerks and looks up:

But the top of the stairs stand empty in the moonlight.

He moves through the hall and into the parlor and stands by a great window from which he can see all the houses of the town, dark, asleep, and beyond:

The silver rocket on the far side of town, waiting.

Another sound draws him. He moves through the parlor, the dining room, and advances toward a half open door.

At the door he suddenly looks back again.

But the rooms are empty.

He pushes the door quietly open. He looks in at:

Two shapes asleep on a great bed, his MOTHER and FATHER.

He stares, palely.

For even as we see, so must SPENDER see and remember that this scene is vaguely familiar. This man and woman lie out upon the bed in much the same posture as the bodies of:

The two people SPENDER and WILDER found in the new Martian town. SPENDER cannot take his eyes away for:

The pattern of leaves from a bush outside the moonlit window of his parents' room which throws a shifting darkness about their faces and bodies. It makes it seem as if they were surrounded by blowing black bits of autumn chaff, as if they were dead and being frittered away in the wind.

Yet it is only a bush outside the window which does this.

SPENDER sees it, and looks again at the sleeping people.

And from the bed his FATHER's VOICE says, quietly, not moving.

THE FATHER
Jeff? You all right?

SPENDER after a long pause, replies.

SPENDER
All right.

Moths tap at every window. Leaves blow up in the air outside, across the stars. He begins his last slow tour, this time moving back toward the front door.

Which lies before him, beckoning.

The CAMERA moves with him into the dark hall. He passes the stair landing. There is a creak.

SPENDER whirls and looks up.

At the top of the stairs, very calm and upright, stands his brother, JIM.

They stand that way for a long moment. SPENDER looks up that long flight at JIM.

SPENDER draws a trembling breath. At last he says:

SPENDER
Who are you?

Silence. JIM is motionless.

SPENDER repeats, with slow dread.

SPENDER
Who are you?

JIM stays motionless there at the top of the stairs.

SPENDER goes on.

SPENDER
My brother Jim is dead. My mother is dead. My father is dead. This house burned twenty years ago.

JIM stirs. He leans.

SPENDER tightens, ready.

JIM takes one step down.

SPENDER stares.

In the motioned light, there is a hint of silver mask echoed out from beneath the familiar face of JIM.

SPENDER whirls. He leaps.

He seizes the doorknob. Locked.

JIM, his face familiar again, the hint of mask gone, walks down the stairs.

His shadow spreads like dark water on the entry floor.

SPENDER kicks.

The glass door shatters.

Exploded out with the meteor glass, SPENDER strikes the porch floor, running. In one arc, with the CAMERA flying with him, he vaults the porch-rail.

Lands running. Vanishes in woodland.

Racing, SPENDER fires his gun.

In the town, at the shot, weathervanes freeze.

The town clock shuts up its striking in mid-chime.

Colored glass windows tremble and sing.

Lace curtains snap threads like vast spiderwebs torn under the hint of storms to come.

The upright piano stirs as if mice scurried through its harping gut.

SPENDER fires again, running. Far behind, we see the figure of JIM in full pursuit.

A wind hurries clouds across the moon.

Trees shake. Leaves fall.

Town weathercocks spin.

Dust sneezes out of rain-gutters.

Windows crack.

Screen doors blow wide. Inner front doors and back doors bang open.

INTERCUT, swiftly, startled, driven, we see WILDER, LUSTIG, CHANCE, HATHAWAY, HINKSTON, in the halls, in the doors, wheeling to look back, stare out at:

The wild sea of grass agitating the lawns.

The wind roars through the town. It scours the color from the houses. It bleaches trees. It is a muted undersea wind, strange-sounding, like no wind we have ever heard before.

INTERCUT, swiftly, we find WILDER, LUSTIG, CHANCE, HINKSTON, HATHAWAY backing off across front or back porches, or going down the porch steps, or already on the wild lawns, gazing here, there, roundabout, seized at and pummeled by the terrible phenomena.

WILDER on his porch, through the bay-window sees:

Storms suctioning his house, causing the curtained bead-crystals beyond the dining room entryway to fall in down pours of strange rain.

As the piano chords insanely and sheds its wooden skin.

And, above him, on the porch, the Chinese crystals fall in a cruel snow, muted and faraway, on the wooden planks.

HATHAWAY, half down his porch steps, sees:

The chain swing collapse and crash to ruin as:

Tireswings drop from trees with thundering rainfalls of peaches, apples, pears, a great hoofbeat of fruit which paws the torn earth.

CHANCE, on his lawn, sees:

The iron deer crash over, flake, and gust away in bronze-white flakes.

LUSTIG, on his backporch, sees:

The tapestry rug unthread, unravel, snap free of the washlines.

HINKSTON sees: curtains sucked out windows. They fly off like immense prehistoric beasts on the wind.

In the street, PARKHILL cries out as:

A church tower flings loose its bells.

They strike with muted underwater clangs on the cement.

At exactly the same moment, every tree in town sheds its leaves. They soar in clouds like locust plagues!

Chittering, skirling, they mob along the roofs.

They pluck paint, they pull shingles. And as if the leaves and shingles were one race of roused night creatures, in one long sluicing motion we see the house-roofs denuded, stripped free to show the attic frames.

The shingles soar off with the leaves.

SPENDER runs. Behind him:

JIM runs. His clothes are torn and eroding. His skin is changing color. He resembles the Martians we saw before the landing of the Robot Probe.

From above, SPENDER and JIM run in a land of dead trees. The grass is almost gone, its last dry shreds whisking away.

As WILDER and his men circle in through the town square, bombarded by storms.

They meet back to back, staring round:

THE CAMERA CIRCLES, wind-blown, to find open doors at each house surrounding the square. Within the doors, shadows.

The shadows move forward.

Each of the men, in turn, sees:

Their relatives, small, withdrawn, in those far entryways.

CUT TO: in the great whirlwind night, SPENDER plunges through the town, THE CAMERA rushing with him.

WILDER and his men spin about at a shout.

SPENDER stumbles.

A clock tower falls.

SPENDER, terrified, sees the rubble smash flat nearby.

Instantly, the town bandstand, close by, shrieks its timbers. It drops. It bangs out dusty clouds. A billion black autumn leaves surge wild upon the air.

SPENDER reels, the leaves flicking him.

The sky is smothered with black shreds.

SPENDER fends the leaves off, mouth wide, eyes panicked, then, whirling, sees:

JIM looming up.

SPENDER's fist clenches. The pistol blasts.

WILDER and the others, in motion, freeze.

The relatives in all the doorways stiffen in silence.
JIM, standing very still, puts his hand to the wound in his side. His eyes look from it to JEFF, stricken, and uncomprehending.

He stands under a tree where the leaves are still thick. In shadow, slowly, JIM begins to sink.

Slowly, the relatives in the doorways pull back, sighing.

JIM slides toward the earth.

WILDER, stunned, can only watch.

As does SPENDER, the pistol slack in his hand.

JIM lies now on the worn summer grass, covered with bleak shadows.

His face, dimly seen, is covered with a silver mask. His eyes, a faint gleam, are yellow as gold coins. He sighs.

The shadows in the doors pull back, one by one.

SPENDER watches as:

JIM's lips whisper in the dark of the tree.

JIM
We were afraid. We only wanted to know...more about you.

The yellow eyes go shut.

JEFF's hand falls into the light. It changes color.

The leaves drop, as if with his death, snowing down.

The house doors are now completely empty. The relatives have fled.

A great muted thunder shakes the town.

WILDER and his men look up.

Slowly, the houses fall apart. The last timbers collapse. Roofs fall down on floors, floors collapse to yet other floors. Upstairs bedrooms bang down into parlors which in turn bang down into cellars, with undersea murmurs.

The storm rises in a final fury, circling the square and the stunned men.

Who look at SPENDER and down at the body.

Which is covered with blowing black leaves.

SPENDER is absolutely frozen, his eyes blind as a statue's.

The men, threatened, turning, now disengage. WILDER, first, in a torrent of leaves, moves.

The CAMERA runs with each man as they increase their pace. There is only one thought now. Each wants to get out. SPENDER is forgotten as buildings crack and fall.

Beyond town, they see: the gleam of the waiting rocket.

They run.

SPENDER does not see. He stands alone as they flee.

And from their view, running, we see SPENDER standing there over the body of his dead brother, the wind dusting both of them.

The CAMERA runs with WILDER.

The CAMERA runs with LUSTIG.

And SPENDER vanishes away, left behind.

Now, from above, as the six men run, the CAMERA paces them over a landscape where the Ohio town is completely rubbed away. They tread the stones of an ancient Martian city, dead ten thousand years.

Their feet bang down on old mosaics.

They race under the now strangely vibrant moon.

They reach a crumbled wall.

They leap over. They land. And, in landing:

Tread raw sunlit earth.

The storm dies.

The sky winks like a Cyclops' eye.

The Moon becomes the Sun.

It is high noon.

Bright green mirrors, burnt in the sand by the rocket landing, reflect the racing men.

Who abruptly stand bolt-still as if smashed to earth by the hammer Sun.

Amazed, they stare up.

The Sun strikes fire across the sky.

Sweat lacquers their astonished, their dismayed faces.

THE STORY TELLER
And so a Homecoming was finished, the Strawberry Festival done, the Sunday picnics never to be. The Children of Space went forth from the Garden, and the Garden was no more. They searched the heavens for deliverance. They wanted friends. They looked for visitors much like themselves bourne in a firewind across space from Earth, to colonize this Eden, freshly lost. Soon. (PAUSE) But now...it was a time of waiting. (PAUSE) A new and terrible day began at Noon.

The fire wavers, reflected, in their stunned eyes, as the CAMERA pulls slowly up and away from WILDER and his men who are all fixed and riveted to the ground by the sun's fury. They blind-gaze up, as the CAMERA pulls away still higher to diminish them, lose them among the ruins of the ancient town where nothing is left to be seen of the Ohio homes and lovely trees.

THE CAMERA moves so high that not only the men but the town becomes merely a mark upon a desert country. Even the rocket grows small and at last is lost to view. We hold upon the red disc of Mars itself as we finally:

DISSOLVE TO DARKNESS.

DISSOLVE IN:

A colorless blaze of sky.

A date.

A title.

AUGUST 22nd, 1999

"THE MARTIAN"

DISSOLVE OUT:

DISSOLVE IN:

Dawn over the dead sea bottoms of Mars.

The rocket camp lies far away. Larger and better lit, perhaps, but remote. From it drifts the sound of a lone harmonica.

In one of the ancient ruined Martian towns, the CAMERA prowls along to stop by a niche between two animal statues where one statue has fallen to rubble. Near the rubble we find the feet of a man who stands very still.

THE CAMERA shifts up along the length of the frozen man. Like a statue he stands among other stone figures. When the CAMERA reaches his face we see that it is: SPENDER. He is desperately aged, bearded, and wild. And his eyes stare only at:

The rocket.

The twin moons drift over the sky.

A river of dust blows along the empty canals, carrying night mirages with it.

Sand is kicked over the edge of a canal.

The sand pours down in a dry fall.

SPENDER is suddenly there, balanced on the edge of the canal, like a statue which has not walked but been carried and set down.

His image is mirrored on the shifting sands below which waver his shape in their strange flowing tides.

But SPENDER looks only at:

The rocket.

CUT TO: an amphitheatre at dusk. The great spaces echo with a faint sound.

Masks topple and blow on the stage, abandoned.

A man stands over them, again not as if he has walked here, but as if someone had lifted him and placed him like a chesspiece. It is SPENDER.

Slowly he reaches down to touch a mask, hesitate, his fingers trembling on it as if he were blind and reaching for some felt object in the dark. Then, he picks the mask up.

He turns the mask over to peer out through the slots.

He holds it a foot from his face and slowly wheels.

The Martian world wheels through the eye-slots of the mask, motions, and stops.

SPENDER's gaze burns white-hot at what he sees.

Held and focussed in the slots is the far bright shape of the silver rocketship.

SPENDER stares.

The rocket lies waiting.

His hand slowly moves.

And the mask is now on its way to fit over his face.

CLOSEUP, the CAMERA sees the mask coming toward it. It fits over the CAMERA as if it were SPENDER's face.

CUT TO: Noon high above the spread of sea-bottom, canal, and, distantly, the rocket camp. The CAMERA hovers in a blowing silence. Nothing moves below in the heat.

Then slowly, sighing, the CAMERA begins to fly down, faster and yet faster, toward the far rim of a canal. We can faintly make out the shapes of some bright hovercraft or tractors stationed by the canal rim. And then, at last; the figures of two men standing there.

Swiftly, the CAMERA rushes down upon this scene. We hear a screaming sound, higher, higher, constant, and ever-increasing. The canal rim is nearer. The men are clearer. They look up. The screaming rises to an incredible pitch.

The CAMERA hurtles, flings itself upon:

PARKHILL and HINKSTON. In the last instant before possible impact, we see them from a distance of twenty feet, startled, then alarmed.

For, suddenly, stretched out from either side of the CAMERA, two hands have appeared. PARKHILL falls aside. The hands seize HINKSTON, pluck him up. In a great zooming arc the CAMERA lifts him up and over the canal and lets him loose.

As the CAMERA flies up it looks back to see HINKSTON falling away and away. Just before he strikes far across the deep canal, we veer off.

The sun flashes over.

And again we are diving, this time on PARKHILL who scrambles up, looks around and reaches for his pistol as the CAMERA screams down upon him.

At the last instant before impact, the hands reach out again.

OUT TO: PARKHILL lifting his gun.

PARKHILL's face, CLOSEUP.

REVERSE SHOT: out of the sun falls a body, flying on a power-jet unit, hands outstretched. It is SPENDER. On his face he wears the Martian mask.

The mask rams into the CAMERA.

PARKHILL fires and falls aside.

SPENDER misses him and the jets scream him up into the sun.

PARKHILL fires again and again and again.

But SPENDER has vanished. The jet scream is gone.

A red rain falls upon PARKHILL. It touches his shirt. It falls upon the back of his hand.

Stunned he can only look from the sky to the red rain, and out, unbelievingly, at the far canal bottom where HINKSTON lies crumpled. DISSOLVE TO:

Dusk in the ruins of a Martian town.

Above, very high, dark birdlike objects fly in the darkening heavens. They disperse, scattering. One object flies down over the town.

WILDER soars low, searching, gun ready.

The CAMERA soars with him as he sees:

The crystal pillars of the old library. A soft singing of voices echoes; the books are speaking in the late day.

WILDER lands. There is instant silence. A dim light shines deep within the pillars. WILDER steps cautiously within. He walks in half-darkness, unbuckling his jet-power

belt. He carries it in his left hand now, ready to drop it should it interfere with his actions. He holds his pistol ready.

And comes round a last bulwark to see:

A corridor of harpstrung scrolls which whisper-hum in the fresh night. At the end of the corridor, a circular room. In the center of that room, under a light, a vast round stone table on which scrolls, charts and various archaeological objects are tumbled.

WILDER walks carefully forward.

He circles the table. These scrolls have the look of a freshly abandoned project. Someone was here a moment before.

He eyes all the dark corners of the deep building.

He puts out his hand to touch one of the books when:

A VOICE
Captain Wilder.

He turns swiftly to scan the darkness in a circle.

But the library is like a great undersea grotto. There are many places to hide. At last the voice speaks again.

A VOICE
Please place your weapon in the center of the table.

WILDER hesitates. Finally he sets the gun far out in the middle of the table, amidst the scrolls.

A VOICE
Sit down, please.

Slowly, he sits.

The shadows stir. There is the merest whisper of feet treading the dust.

WILDER looks to one side.

A mask appears in the dark. A MAN stands among the ancient scroll displays. He carries a book in one hand, gun in the other.

WILDER stares at:

The silver mask. And then down at: a bandaged and bloodied arm.

SPENDER, for that is who it is, walks slowly to the other side of the table and stands silent, gazing at WILDER.

WILDER speaks.

WILDER
Hinkston is dead.

The mask is quiet and impassive, but SPENDER's voice comes from behind it.

SPENDER
Mars is dead. Which do we weep for?

He puts the gun on the table near his right hand. He sits.

WILDER waits for him to speak.

SPENDER places the book on the table and gently riffles the thin gossamer pages which tine and hum and murmur with old song.

SPENDER
I've had a month to think. This town is lovely and quiet. The library is old. It speaks of other years. I've listened. I've begun to know. This was a good world with good people trying to make do with themselves, to work and grow, and give up killing. How?
(He muses for a moment)
I think they saw their own darkness clear. I think they looked straight on at murder until it no longer could put out their eyes. The evil thing that runs in man, they drank it whole. It poisoned them, made them sick, perhaps for a long time. But when they got well they were well forever. They were human at last, and could leave each other alone and live in peace.
(he closes the book)
I wish they were my ancestors.

He looks up at WILDER now at last.

SPENDER
We don't belong here.

WILDER waits, watches, listens.

SPENDER
Soon we'll build atomic research and atom bomb depots here. And the other power interests coming up, the miners, the import-export, the briefcase-computer men. Remember what happened to Mexico when Cortez and his fine friends arrived from Spain? A whole civilization ground to dust.

WILDER
This late in the day, can you stop Cortez?

SPENDER rises at the challenge and stares across the table, but his voice is firm and quiet.

SPENDER
Yes. If your rocket fails to return to Earth, what then? When enough time passes and you don't report, won't the experts fear mechanical failures, bad design? The next rocket may be delayed a year, two years, while they re-check, experiment, perfect.

WILDER nods.

WILDER
Correct.

SPENDER moves slowly around the table.

SPENDER
With luck I'll live to be sixty years old. Each new expedition that lands on Mars will be met by me. There won't be more than one ship at a time coming up, every few years, and never more than ten men in a crew. I'll make friends, and then kill them. Mars will be untouched for the next half-century. By then, the people may call it all off, scrub it. Remember how disillusioned they became with dirigibles and zeppelins that were always going down in flames? Well.

WILDER
You've got it all planned.

SPENDER
I have.

WILDER
Yet you're outnumbered. In an hour, we'll have you surrounded. In two hours you'll be dead.

SPENDER gestures along the dark corridors.

SPENDER
I've found some fine hiding places. I'll wait. A week, a month from now, you'll be off guard. Then I pick you off, one by one. Everyone, that is, except you.

WILDER is faintly surprised.

WILDER
ME?

SPENDER put both hands on the table and leans forward to make his point.

SPENDER
We're similar people. You not only look, you <u>see</u>. You <u>do</u> see all of this, don't you?

WILDER turns slowly, with a certain echo of sadness and a sense of passing time in his face. He nods.

WILDER
Yes. I see. And, things being different, I'd like to live here.

SPENDER
You may, if you want.

WILDER is taken off-guard by this and might protest, but SPENDER cuts in, moving toward a vast window between pillars.

SPENDER
Look. There's a little villa down that way with reels of Martian music in it at least fifty thousand years old.

It still plays. Music the like of which you'll never hear again in all your life. You could hear it. And then, this library, Lord, look at these books. In no time, I've learned to use them. You could learn. In the long days, then, sit, read, and strangely enough, through voices dead ten thousand years, find and remember yourself.

There is a moment of quiet. SPENDER is very near, almost towering over WILDER in his intense desire to convince and tell. WILDER looks round at the library, the window, the books.

WILDER
It all sounds quite wonderful.

The fire slowly drains from SPENDER.

SPENDER
But–you won't stay?

WILDER
No. Thanks.

SPENDER turns his back and moves restlessly off, uneasy again.

SPENDER
And you certainly won't let me stay without trouble. I must kill you all.

WILDER estimates the man's back, as SPENDER picks up his pistol.

WILDER
If your luck holds.

SPENDER turns and stares at him.

SPENDER
It will. I have something to fight and live for. That makes me a killer who can't be killed. This is my religion now. It's like learning to breathe all over again.

He grows quiet. Slowly he circles the room, now around behind WILDER, who does not turn, but merely senses him there without having to look.

Half into the dimness, SPENDER pauses and reflects.

SPENDER
One last thing. If, by some strange happenstance, you should win, do me a favor? See what can be done to restrict tearing this world apart, at least for forty years. Until the archeologists have had a decent chance?

WILDER
Yes. I promise that.

SPENDER
And, if it helps any, just think of me as a very crazy fellow who went berserk one summer day and never was right again.

After a long pause, WILDER turns.

SPENDER is gone. The corridors are empty. Perhaps the merest hum of books, disturbed, indicate his passage away in the dark.

Taking a deep breath, WILDER stretches across the table to put his hand on his gun. Instantly CUT TO:

WILDER soaring up in the clear last light of day, his radar equipment beeping.

We INTERCUT the other men, flying, making for a mid-air rendezvous, their radar machines signaling louder and louder.

The six men hover, motioning in toward one another.

At which instant, there is a flash of light.

WILDER jerks about in mid-air.
The rocket, distantly, explodes.

CLOSEUP, we see the ship disintegrate, the camp destroyed.

The men are plucked by the shock wave, tumbled on the air, head-over-heel.

A great column of fire and smoke ascends into the sky.

We see SPENDER, in mid-air, not far from the rocket, gun in hand, having fired the shot that burst the ship asunder, now turned head-over-heels himself and spun crazily off on a blasting wind.

The men right themselves and hang in a strange silence.

We see their faces, one by one, stunned by the destruction of the ship that was supposed to take them home to Earth.

Then, realization grows. Their eyes shift.

Far off they see the spot of light which indicates SPENDER.

SPENDER, CLOSEUP, has righted himself and stares down at the daring flames, his face emotionless behind the mask.

CUT TO: WILDER and his men streaking in SPENDER's direction.

SPENDER, seeing them, rams on power, plummets down and away in swift flight.

The men, rushing, fire.

Explosions blossom thirty yards behind SPENDER.

SPENDER veers up, down, and away to his right.

The men fire, flying.

More explosions appear all around SPENDER, who cuts off in a fiord among the mountains.

WILDER veers around the cliff-face.

The men roar after him, guns ready.

And they fly, pursuers and pursued, now high in the last ribbons of sunlight which paint the bas-reliefs of animals on the cliffsides all yellow gold, and now down in cool-well darkness.

The men fire, the echoes roar.

Explosions fix themselves in constellations about the rushing SPENDER who is buffeted by the concussion, and who returns the fire.

Bullets detonate among the men who veer and thrust, like startled birds.

INTERCUT, we see the faces of LUSTIG, HATHAWAY, CHANCE, and PARKHILL, all fierce and pale. For, after all, SPENDER has destroyed their only contact with Earth.

Only WILDER flies, swiftly but calmly. The rocket is gone. The quarry must be brought down. It is that simple.

Now on the great river of dusky air the tiny men skim swiftly around vast curves of stone, where SPENDER, darting, rising, falling, leads them on.

And the sculptures and bas-reliefs they flash by are so huge, so incredible, the men cannot but notice and are torn with the immensity of this valley of fantastic shapes and sizes. Another time they might linger. Now they bullet on.

One explosion strikes the air so close to SPENDER it whirls him about like a leaf on the wind. But in whirling he still fires, wildly.

Shattering cliff-sides and bas-reliefs to left and right.

Then SPENDER, recovered, darts ahead, only to be caught again by a direct hit on his left leg.

CLOSEUP we see on SPENDER's face the dread reality of his wound.

He darts around a cliff-side.

An instant later, the men round the vast slab of stone, to see SPENDER vanish into a labyrinth in the mountainside.

They leap, screaming jets, down after.

WILDER reaches the mouth of a cave which is intersticed with pillars.

A hundred yards ahead, SPENDER can be seen flying, weaving, lacing himself among man-made stalactites and stalagmites.

The men fire and fly among the pillared obstructions.

It is like rushing through a forest that falls as they fire and knock away an upthrust of stone here, a downpour of stone there. SPENDER appears, disappears.

SPENDER rushes forth to light.

WILDER and his men, delayed by falling rock, hover, spin, and issue forth.

Only to find themselves confronted by a great mile high face of smooth rock upon which histories are etched and stamped in symbols, and in which are stone faces with open eyes and gaping mouths, each large enough to hide a man.

WILDER lifts his hand.

He and his men hover like hummingbirds on the silent air.

SPENDER is nowhere to be seen. The air is empty. The cliff-side is empty.

WILDER, hung upon the dusky air, peers up.

As do the other men.

And still the gaping stone mouths are empty, shadowed.

The wide stone eyes regard these buzzing flies that must soon turn home in the dark.

WILDER looks carefully around.

The faces cut in the mile high rock gaze back at him from other centuries.

And then, WILDER quickens.

Almost instantly, the other men do likewise.

For from the mouth of one face high and far over on the precipice, in late sunlight, a slow trickle of red appears.

The red color spreads down over the stone lip of the ancient face as if the bas-relief were itself being bled.

Within that gaping mouth, shadowed, the shape of a man can be seen, leant against the rock. And from that mouth we can hear the exhausted breathing of the wounded quarry, SPENDER.

The CAMERA rushes in to find him.

He looks out, and beyond. his tired gaze we see the hovering, waiting, uncertain men.

SPENDER aims his pistol.

In the sights, we see WILDER.

SPENDER's gaze tightens.

WILDER is there, as good as dead, in the sights.

SPENDER's eyes slacken.

He lets the pistol fall.

WILDER and his men react to the sharp clack which echoes it the fiord.

And still that red color runs down from the astonished mouth of the ancient god.

SPENDER waits, controlling his breathing.

And beyond those waiting men out there, danced quietly upon the wind, he hears and sees:

An avalanche roar down the cliff-side further back, as bas-reliefs collapse from the holes blasted in them by SPENDER's gunfire and the return gunfire of his pursuers.

Whole golden segments of beautiful cliff-sculpture slide out of the last rays of the sun at the top of the cliff and vanish down into blue dusk.

SPENDER's eyes, behind his mask, see this and know once more that he, an Earth man, has caused ruin.

He looks at his empty hand.

He removes the mask slowly from his face. He lets it tumble.

The echo of the mask striking stone startles the men to zipzag somewhat up, somewhat down, waiting.

Instantly, SPENDER appears, flung out hiding, leapt forth to hover twenty feet from the gaping, red-stained stone mouth.

His hand snaps up to aim.

WILDER fires. Then, he sees:

CLOSEUP, SPENDER's hand, which is empty. It only pretends to hold a gun. It imitates a pistol.

Too late. SPENDER receives the bullet.

Struck, slammed once around and back, SPENDER is bourne straight toward the cliff. THE CAMERA runs with him.

The cliff rushes at him.

With thunderous impact, SPENDER strikes the bas-relief, spread-eagled.

SPENDER, pinned against the bas-relief, outspread and held by his own jet-power, constricts his dying body, eyes shut, face turned aside.

His hands make fists upon the sandworn stone.

WILDER and his men, silent, guns holstered, can only watch as:

SPENDER breathes slowly, then opens his fists as if to free himself of life.

Slowly he sinks, as his power dies, down along the cliffside, down along the immense faces and bas-reliefs. He starts his descent in the last rays of the sun which strike into the fiord from a long distance.

WILDER watches, cold and alone.

The others see:

A long ribbon of red unwind from the sliding distant mothlike body of SPENDER as it sinks and slithers down and down the side of the cliff. The ribbon unwinds very bright. By the time SPENDER has sunk from sight in the dark at the base of the cliff, the scarlet sash, the bright path red, stretches fifty of sixty yards from start to obscured finish.

WILDER hovers for a long moment.

The men hover, staring at that empty cliff face.
Then, with one mind, they all fly down into the dusk.

WILDER stands over!

The crumpled shape at the base of the cliff.

The other men are behind him.

WILDER bends to take one arm.

PARKHILL hesitates, then bends to take the other.

The other men crouch.

And silently they are airbourne. The CAMERA drifts up with them as they rise high along the blue shadowed stone-precipices where stranger creatures than themselves fly sculpted in old symboled pictures.

And their funeral procession, their airbourne cortege, flies quietly higher, SPENDER's body carried among the stunned men into the air of evening where the first stars are coming out.

The cortege hovers, veers with a whispering sigh of jets, and moves across the darkening heavens.

CLOSEUP, briefly, we see each emotionless face pass.

And the procession goes along the sky, a collection of songless birds, carrying silence between them, growing smaller and smaller until there are only star constellations to be seen over the serene hills and lands, and they are gone.

DISSOLVE.

FADE IN:

A date.

A title.

October 1st, 1999

"THE CASTAWAYS"

DISSOLVE TO:

In a series of DISSOLVES we see the blasted pit where the rocket once stood being filled with drifted sand. The green mirror fragments cloud over and are buried.

THE STORY TELLER
Time passes. Old scars must heal. The Past lies very near, waiting to help the Future.

The CAMERA prowls the Martian tombyards.

THE STORY TELLER
Old tombs stand empty, and must be filled.

THE CAMERA moves in on a carved stone where old heiroglyphs have been crossed out with a single stroke of ink or paint. Below, in a neat lettering, we read:

LEONARD HINKSTON
Born 1970. Died 1999.

THE CAMERA moves in on another tomb nearby where a similar thing has occurred and we read:

JEFFREY SPENDER
Born 1960. Died 1939.

We see WILDER and his men encamped not far from where the rocket exploded, with a bare minimum of comforts.

They look up at, the hills, the villas.

THE STORY TELLER
The towns lie empty and waiting.

DISSOLVE to a second encampment, further up the hills nearer the villas.

WILDER and his men look back down at the deserted rocket pit, and at the hills again.

The Martian streets blow dust.

THE STORY TELLER
The towns lie empty.

We see a third encampment, this time in the very street of the town.

The men, uneasy, at their fire, not yet able to make the final decision to more inside, WILDER among them. They look at the far away rocket pit now, almost lost in the late day.

They turn to look at the near buildings.

THE STORY TELLER
The dwelling places lie empty...

Slowly the men rise, because WILDER has risen.

THE STORY TELLER
...and must be filled.

We see the men at doorways of many ancient villas.

We see them hesitate inside the quiet houses of dust.

CHANCE pulls aside the top of:

An old lava-table which bubbles its silvery liquids.

The men gather with this primordial light on their faces.

LUSTIG hesitates, and then, slowly, drops meat down into the bubbling liquid as they all watch.

At the doors of bedrooms the men look in at:

The vast low beds.

THE STORY TELLER
The beds are empty...

The men move in to stand, wearily, by the beds:

One by one they sink down into softness and sleep.

THE STORY TELLER
...and are empty no more.

Back at the original encampment, we can see faint lights up in the villas, hear faint music as the remnants of old campfires blow away here.

From the villas, one by one, looking out and up, we see WILDER and his men, watchful of the stars.

WILDER and his men, in the amphitheatre. CHANCE, on stage, playing his harmonica. Applause. All muted under the Narration.

THE STORY TELLER
And, last of all, that most urgent emptiness that gathers in the soul...waiting for a long night to end...

The men, watching CHANCE, glance up, nervous, uneasy, at the sky.

THE STORY TELLER
And that emptiness, too, suddenly bursts with filling.

The men stand in a body.

They point, they gaze in awe.

For a single light has moved slowly, far out in space.

Their eyes brim over.

CUT TO: bright day. A rocket comes down like a monster from space.

It groans and settles. It cools. After a long ticking moment, its port opens, and ladders slide down.

THE STORY TELLER
And Columbus was come again...to meet the natives... on the shore.

The new men, out of the rocket, resembling insects, locked tight in their space suits, whirl at a shout.

They fix their eyes. They stare.

For a band of natives does indeed stand not far off, dressed in Martian garments, somewhat ill-fitting, but dressed nonetheless.

The new rocket men gape.

Among the "natives" WILDER shouts with high good humor.

WILDER
Greetings, travelers from a far world!

The rocket captain murmurs.

THE CAPTAIN
Good Lord, they speak English!

WILDER retorts with a wild, a capricious, an irresistible cry.

WILDER
Your damn tootin'!!

The new rocket men gasp, then shout.

WILDER'S MEN shout out a great sigh and choke of laughter.

Then all is tumult, rushing, colliding, as "natives" and "invaders" leap forward to clutch, pummel, and embrace.

And the CAMERA pulls back away to let the collision occur, to view it from a distance and let emotions run.

THE STORY TELLER
So the last emptiness was filled to overflowing. The drought was over. A time of rich HARVEST lay at hand.

DISSOLVE OUT.

DISSOLVE IN:

A date.

A title.

July lst, 2001

"THE LOCUSTS"

DISSOLVE OUT.

A dozen rockets burn down toward Mars.

THE STORY TELLER
And it was indeed the End of the Beginning. The Rockets came in. They came from the stars and the black velocities of space. They moved in the midnight waters of space like pale sea Leviathans.

The rockets shine like meteors, like vast schools of incredible bright fish.

They pass the double moons of Mars in magnificent display.

And as they swarm by, we x-ray them with our CAMERA so we can see the men, the bulkheads, the machines honeycombed within.

THE STORY TELLER
The rockets came like a locust plague, swarming in blooms of rosey smoke. And locked in the warm honeycomb of each ship were men who came to Mars because they were afraid or unafraid, happy or unhappy, who came to dig up something, bury something, or leave something alone. They came with large dreams or none at all. They only knew that Mars was a distant shore where men might spread in waves, each wave different, each wave stronger than the last.

The rockets pass. Meteors flick by and, hurtling, throw radioactive light upon the ships which flush with heat and are x-rayed by the rushing and secret illumination! Again and again we gaze through the metal skins of the rockets as we x-ray interiors and find the wildly traveling men.

The rockets reverse and fire down, settling upon Mars.

THE STORY TELLER
And out of so much sound and fury came a quiet moment.

CLOSEUP: a man's hand lets fall a ball of twine.

WHICH tumbles unraveling along the earth.

A web of string quivers over desert vistas, to the pound of hammers.

THE STORY TELLER
A great harp of twine staked out humming across Mars to show men the shape of their new lives.

We see men bent with hammers, pounding stakes.; the first frames going up.

We see men pause to catch breath from small transparent masks they clap to their faces.

The CAMERA swiftly scans the rising buildings, the huge strung areas of staked-out territory.

Swiftly in MONTAGE we see more rockets land, and machines let down to move off and delve at the soil.

THE STORY TELLER
And Machines delivered themselves of more Machines, which went forth upon a land where before the towns were built the naming of names occurred.

We see Martian landscapes, villas, towers near and far.

THE STORY TELLER
The old Martian names were names of water, air, wind and sand, and names of sealed and buried philosophers ten thousand years dead. But each Age christens itself anew...so now fresh maps said: IRON TOWN, STEEL CITY, ALUMINUM I, ELECTRIC VILLAGE, the machined nominations of Earth. Along with warmer names from the first men who walked here...So there was a Hinkston Creek, a Lustig Corners, a Chance Crossroads, and, of course, a Wilder Town.

We see the above as they are named, and watch towns spring up, mushroom, and become complete.

THE STORY TELLER
And the towns stood ready. And it was time for the last most precious cargo to come from Earth.

Rockets roar down.

Men wait on the tarmac, below.

The rocket airlocks open.

And in the silent wind stepping out to glide down the long treadway escalators come the women of the men who live on Mars.

The women reach the bottom and are taken and held silently, warmly, by the men, and all look up as:

A PRIEST, FATHER PEREGRINE and a MINISTER, REVEREND WISWELL glide down in the silent weather.

THE STORY TELLER
And to govern the Seed Time and the Harvest time of men came final men looking to find new shapes of God in a strange place but who also remembered His words "Blessed are those who love my children before Me."

The holy men look out at Mars and down at:

The warm harvest of people below on the tarmac.

And the lights come on in the town.

The people turn.

And the priest and minister, gliding down in the dusk, see the warm lights blinking.

THE STORY TELLER
And the lights did come on. And Mars was inhabited by the seed of Earth.

DISSOLVE OUT TO:

DISSOLVE IN:

A date.

A title.

April 21st, 2002

"THE GREEN MORNING"

DISSOLVE OUT TO:

DISSOLVE IN: the land burning with noon.

Whole communities of houses under bubbles.

Women, moving in the streets between the bubbled quonset huts, pausing to breathe deeply from their portable oxygen masks.

Children, at play, doing likewise.

In MONTAGE we see men, women, children at work and play pausing to drink oxygen, or going into the bubbles which shelter the houses and provide atmospheres.

THE STORY TELLER
And still a great problem remained for one man to solve. So the people waited...

We see the men, women, children, gasping, look up.

THE STORY TELLER
...and that man arrived.

A rocket thunders out of the sun.

A port opens. BENJAMIN DRISCOLL steps forth.

He surveys the shimmering land, beaming, delighted.

DRISCOLL
Mars!

He takes a deep breath. He faints and falls.

Men carry DRISCOLL back in the rocket.

THE STORY TELLER
...only to be sent back home.

The rocket vanishes up in the sky.

The rocket roars back down the sky.

THE STORY TELLER
But to return, full-armed, for combat.

DRISCOLL steps out again, helmeted and proud, smiling even more triumphantly, waving a packet in his hand. The packet slips!

DRISCOLL leans over the side of the gantry, dismayed.

The packet plummets down.

DRISCOLL shouts, then remembers to swing the helmet up so he can be heard.

DRISCOLL
Heads up!

He slams the helmet back in place.

The packet falls.

And strikes on the tarmac bar a man who has leapt aside.

The elevator hisses down.

The man bends to touch a thick spread of dark seeds.

The elevator arrives, DRISCOLL in it.

THE MAN
Driscoll! What's this?

DRISCOLL
A gift!

DRISCOLL remembers he cannot be heard. He lifts the helmet.

DRISCOLL
My gift! To Mars!

The man doubts as DRISCOLL bends to seize two handfuls of seeds and display them like precious gems.

DRISCOLL
Air!

CUT AWAY SWIFTLY TO:

The wilderness of Mars, the dead seas and sun-blazed hills. A distant him. Wafted upon a self-contained storm, a quiet breathing of mechanical wind, DRISCOLL floats down out of the sky.

He broadcasts seed.

He rotates so that the back-storm of his portable helicopter sweeps the seeds in patterns down the wind.

The seeds rain-patter to the soil.

He rummages other materials from his knapsacks and glances up.

At thin scatterings of clouds.

He soars, clapping a small oxygen clip-mask over his nose.

Rushing through the thin clouds, he scatters chemicals.

The clouds below him stir.

DRISCOLL observes, suspended from his whispering machine.

A faint flicker of lightning occurs, a faint murmur of thunder follows.

DRISCOLL broadcasts more chemicals.

And sees shadows scurry over hills.

And, face briefly lit, sees more lightning, hears more thunder.

He plummets down to land in the gathering weather.

Efficiency itself, he moves to tether the few supply-carrying balloons to a rock, then throws down a kite-like device which swings out into a half-tent like a butterfly opening its newborn wings. He taps a valve on a packet and it hisses itself into a comfortable sleeping mat. All the while he eyes the sky. He throws down a pellet which bursts into a very nice fire indeed. He squats happily, humming, holding a frying pan over the chemical fire.

DRISCOLL
We will now fry....

Something strikes the pan and...steams.

DRISCOLL
...rain!

Delighted, he watches more drops hit the pan.

DRISCOLL
We will fry, and re-fry, rain!

He shakes the skillet full of steaming, running drops. The fire withers under the growing downfall. Thunder and lightning.

Rain sweeps the land.

DRISCOLL is a boy, amazed.

The rain falls upon the dead sea bottoms.

It drenches the far raw hills.

It pelts the dust in the canals.

Standing, eyes shut, DRISCOLL opens his mouth happily to drink the rain, turning in a circle, palms cupped.

Lightning! Thunder! A great downpour drenches him! In happy shock, he reacts, as we DISSOLVE TO:

The rain ceases at twilight. DISSOLVE TO:

A fire slumbering to pink ash near the remnants of a hearty meal. DRISCOLL lies asleep in the soft light. His lips twitch softly singing in his half-sleep, to the tune of the OLD GREY MARE.

DRISCOLL
...mmm...Johnny Appleseed, planted...the wilderness...
mmm...mmm...the Wilderness, (gasps) Uh?

He half-wakes, startled by something.

He reassures himself. He has only caught himself singing, heard himself in his sleep. He settles back.

DRISCOLL
...Johnny Appleseed...planted the Wilderness...many...
long...years...ago.

He is drowsing again, when he hears a rustling which grows louder as the wind blows across the land. He listens.

DRISCOLL
Hey, wait...

Something like a spider touches his hand; he jerks it away. Then he reaches out in the whispering dark to touch around.

DRISCOLL
Not this quick....

He strikes a match and sees:

His own hand stretched out on the earth over which, moving slowly now, a green plant-form uncurls like a beansprout growing slowly.

DRISCOLL stares until the match burns him. He drops it and grabs a flashlight.

DRISCOLL
Hallelujah!

We see what he sees, grass and plant forms coming up. It is these, stirred by the wind, which have made the whispering sounds.

He snaps on standing illuminations. The land is flooded with light.

Green and more green comes up; the land changes color as he watches.

Chortling, he bends to stroke the grass. On impulse he looks around, and pulls off his boots.

He steps barefoot out in the new grass, treading, bouncing almost dancing, turning, laughing, shaking his head.

He sniffs the air, then flings himself into his equipment and touches the button.

And soars laughing, into the sky, with the light swabbing the lands below in great tilts and mothwhirls to show green and green.

We see the land change color in the first light of dawn.

And DRISCOLL high above in the wind of mornings yelps with happiness.

DRISCOLL
Smell that! Oxygen! My grass, it's making oxygen! Air, new air, all over Mars!

He rips off his oxygen mask and container.

He drops the mask and container. He sweeps higher, laughing, singing. He inhales, and as if the inhalation soared him higher, up he goes.

DRISCOLL
Old Jack Appleseed...

The land grows brighter, greener!

DRISCOLL'S VOICE (faintly singing)
...planted the wilderness...

On the edge of the town, the blowing wind touches the dust at dawn.

DRISCOLL'S VOICE (very far away)
...brought up the apple trees...

Some children out early, playing, helmets over their faces, look up. One child, his helmet off, sniffs, turns, blinks.

The wind blows among the houses.

The child turns to the others and knocks on their helmets and pantomimes them to take them off.

The wind circles the houses which lie under plastic lids.

The children tilt back their helmets and sniff, then breathe deep and yell.

The wind blows through the town, with more dawn light.

It stirs the locks of the few women on the street, who set free the small transparent oxygen masks on their noses and mouths.

Children run into houses.

Sealed windows fly up, women lean out to breathe deep, their hair stirred.

Men come to stand in store-front doors.

Plastic bubbles pop from houses here, there, everywhere. And far off, during all this, with a rising undercurrent of music perhaps coming in under his faint far voice, we hear DRISCOLL singing.

DRISCOLL
...shook down the apricots, sent forth the lilac shoots...

Now everywhere windows fly up and people lean out. In MONTAGE we see helmets dropped or masks let free, men running out of stores or women from their homes.

The land is wide and beautiful. The sun is up. Green bushes spring forth from the earth! And small trees!

The CAMERA flows over the growing, the rich, the lush new land which greens up in orchards as we move, and DRISCOLL's happy voice fades to a talking quiet, somewhere.

DRISCOLL'S VOICE
...planted the wilderness...many long...

And the CAMERA finds a small tree on a little hill of new green grass and under it, his equipment strewn, happy-drowsy, his hands back under his head, contented, lies DRISCOLL, barefoot. As the CAMERA moves in, DRISCOLL finishes.

DRISCOLL
...years...a...go.

At the word "go" he looks up:

The tree above him breaks into blossom.

The wind stirs.

A lovely snow of petals scatters all around him. DRISCOLL brushes them from his face, grinning, eyes shut, as we DISSOLVE OUT swiftly.

FADE IN:

A date.

A title.

NOVEMBER, 2009

"THE VISITOR"

FADE OUT.

DISSOLVE IN: Night. Rain falls steadily over one of the new Martian frontier communities. Rain falls in the long canal waters, in the dark.

Beyond town, on the canal rim, in the raining night, we see a two-story frame house with a number of trees around it, and a picket fence surrounding a neat lawn. The CAMERA moves in on the house in the rain and passes up on the porch and through the rain-streamed parlor window. Inside, the last embers of a fire are dying on the hearth in a comfortable if sparsely furnished room, which looks as if each piece had been imported from another time and place on Earth. The CAMERA prowls the room, looks at the ticking clock, the furniture, and then moves up the stairs to look in at a bedroom.

Where old LAFARGE, in his seventies, and his wife, ANNA, lie, eyes wide, studying the rain patterns on the ceiling. At last he looks over and sees that she, also, is awake in the ticking night, squeezes her arm, and rises. He pads into the hall to an alcove where a small refrigerator stands ready, two glasses, empty, on top. As he does so, he looks around at the rain-shadowed house, and begins to hum under his breath. His wife calls softly from the next room.

ANNA
Lafe!

He steps to the bedroom door and looks in. Lying in bed, she murmurs.

ANNA
You were humming a song...

LAFARGE
Was I?

LAFARGE
A song he used to sing a long time ago.

LAFARGE remembers, and nods, quietly.

LAFARGE
He did.

LAFARGE moves to the bed and hands her a glass. They drink, thinking about the remembered tune.

ANNA
Strange. I looked for his picture today...the one we took just before he died. I had hidden it away, so it couldn't hurt us. But I found it and put it in the top drawer. Why? And now, your singing. Why?

He touches the bureau drawer but does not open it. He gets into bed, and half sitting, holds his wife's head cradled to his side, and at last half-answers her question.

LAFARGE
We're old. We're old. Go to sleep.

She closes her eyes. Her face is lined with not only age but remembrance. He strokes her brow, but the pain will not erase, the memory will not go away. The room is filled with motioning light and shade, too much remembrance for both, and he half lies there, touching his wife's face, and looking at the walls and the rivers of luminous reflection that drift there, and we hear over all this:

THE STORY TELLER
And the people came to Mars, the young and the old. The young to find things, to make things, to take and hold and keep things. The old came to put away, to lose, to forget what is best forgotten.
And this they did. Except on some special strange nights, in a sad weather...

ANNA still tormented, sleeps. LAFARGE begins to settle down when he hears the creak of the picket fence gate, below. He listens. The creak comes again. He sits up on the edge of the bed.

Streams of rain light run across the walls. A single note of a tune is whistled by someone out there.

LAFARGE goes to look into the hall. And down the stairway at the front door. Now the whistling comes again, faintly. It is a frail sound, as if a boy were whistling on his idle rounds. It repeats the nine or ten notes we hears LAFARGE hum a few minutes ago.

LAFARGE stands very still, in disbelief. His hand reaches out, trembling, to clench the stair-rail. THE CAMERA moves with him half down the stair, where he stops again at a single two note whistling, closer now.

He continues on down to the front door. He does not want to open it. But again three notes sound from out in the raining night and his hand inches toward the doorknob and freezes on it. He opens the door. He looks out.

All that we see, at first, is the picket-gate, ajar, blowing in the rainy wind by night, opening, shutting.

This is almost enough for LAFARGE who, ready to relax and forget, stops, for now we hear six or seven notes of the song whistled calmly.

LAFARGE half opens the screen door and edges out.

In the half dark of the raining night, a boy twelve years old balances himself on the top of the picket fence, looking down at his feet as he walks whistling, oblivious of the storm.

LAFARGE steps out.

Lightning flickers. The boy stops whistling.

LAFARGE stares.

CLOSEUP, the boy balances looking at the man on the porch. We see his face running with rain, his large eyes shining in the dark, his gaze calm and curious.

LAFARGE stands with the rain blowing on him.

LAFARGE
Go away.

The boy does not move.

LAFARGE
Go away. Oh God, go away!

The boy leaps out on the air.

And lands on the sidewalk.

LAFARGE pulls back into the house.

The BOY stands in tree shadow in the raining walk.

Inside, LAFARGE holds to the door, the well, eyes shut. His weight has half closed the door. He waits, getting his breath. Over his shoulder we can see the boy, motionless, beyond, out there on the walk. LAFARGE, with one hand, lets the door drift open. He turns and moves away as if unaware he has done this. He goes up the stairs.

Behind him, the front door blows slowly wider. Rain begins to puddle, gleaming, on the wood floor.

In the bedroom, LAFARGE suddenly appears, like a sleepwalker, by the bureau. He looks at: His wife, asleep, and pained with memory. He opens the bureau-drawer and looks down.

In flickers of faint lightning, we see a black-weathered photograph of TOM, his son. The face, CLOSEUP, is the same face we saw on the BOY downstairs balanced on the fence in the stormy darkness.

LAFARGE shuts up the drawer swiftly, turns and goes to get in bed, trembling. His wife moves against him, instinctively.

He lies waiting. Rain illumination crawls down the walls. LAFARGE listens. Faintly, the front door screen whines open. After a moment it taps shut. Then: the front door itself shuts. The sound of wind and rain blowing in below, cease.

The floorboards of the house creak. A shadow moves on the stairs. LAFARGE waits.

THE CAMERA, in the bedroom door, looks in, then glides forward at last.

ANNA sleeps to herself, unaware. A shadow touches the quilt on the bed.

LAFARGE, sensing, does not look, does not interfere.

The room shadows and reshadows itself with falling rain. We hear the boy humming under his breath. In the corner of the room nearest ANNA, we feel, we half see the boy sit himself, squat holding his knees, head down in the dark, humming.

LAFARGE does not turn, but waits, and listens to the humming. The old woman, in her sleep, hears, and gently responds.

And by the bed, in the corner, hidden in shadow, the boy sits, legs against his chest, singing the song softly toward its end. ANNA hears and remembers. Her face, much lined with old pain, begins to calm itself. The sadness slowly erases away. The boy sings. The face of the old woman eases free of ancient burdens. She seems ten years younger now.

Her hand drops off the rim of the bed.
Slowly, a small boy's hand drifts out of the dark to take that hand.

DISSOLVE TO DARKNESS.

DISSOLVE IN: morning fills the windows. We hear frying sounds; a woman, singing.

LAFARGE wakes and looks around, uncertain. Rising, he goes to the bureau. He opens the drawer.

The drawer is empty. The picture is gone.

As he stands there, trying to remember last night, a shadow crosses the window.

A kite flies on the sky.

He steps closer, looking out.

The kite, which might almost be of a Martian design, is very unusual and very beautiful. But the string that holds it passes down around the corner of the house so we cannot see who holds the other end.

LAFARGE turns quickly away.

CUT TO: the kitchen, ANNA busy, her face steamed bright, as she fries their breakfast. LAFARGE, dressed, sticks his head into the room. She glances at him, then falls to her work, speaking brightly, happily, and so quickly that he cannot stop her.

ANNA
Lafe! Isn't it a grand morning. And it'll be a grand afternoon. I've packed a picnic lunch. Then, tomorrow, why we'll go to town. The big illumination. A fine week, a fine month ahead. (Slows) Next year...well, that's next year. Breakfast's ready! Call Tom!

LAFARGE (breaking in at last)
Anna!

She looks at him.

LAFARGE
Don't you remember...?

ANNA
What? Tom zinging to ate all night? Tom sleeping in our room? Well...some nights, boys get lonely.

LAFARGE
Yes, but before that.

ANNA
Why, we had supper, like always, didn't we? the three of us? And got ready for bed? What else do you want me to remember?

Her face clouds. LAFARGE gazes at her and, slowly, relents.

LAFARGE
You look so young this morning.
(PAUSE)
I'll call Tom.

He walks through the house. Stepping out the front door he sees:

The kite flying high. It hums and dances on the wind. Down along the string the CAMERA soars. To find the boy, TOM, holding the string, his face turned away, almost as if he had sensed LAFARGE's arrival.

LAFARGE steps down off the porch and approaches the boy who is still turned away.

The kite floats high, dancing softly.

LAFARGE stops. He says the boy's name once, hesitantly, as if afraid to see his face.

The boy at last turns.

LAFARGE looks at him.

The boy looks back. It is his son.

LAFARGE's voice almost breaks.

LAFARGE
Tom.

TOM lets go the kite. The kite falls in the air. TOM breaks and runs. The CAMERA runs with him. He leaps. He lands against his father. They both catch hold.

The boy buries his face in his father's chest, his face twisted.

Holding him up off the earth, tears pour from LAFARGE':s eyes.

The front door opens. ANNA comes out.

ANNA
Well, come on, you two! Breakfast is...cold!

LAFARGE turns, still holding the boy. He puts the boy down and takes his hand. They walk toward the house.

The kite, blown free, settles down.

The front door taps shut.

The kite falls, beautiful, into the clear water canal. It flows away, forgotten.

CUT TO: Night. ANNA getting into bed. LAFARGE tucking her in.

LAFARGE
There, there.

ANNA
I shall always remember today. The picnic, the car ride,
the boat. It's been so long since we've done so much.
Thank you...And Tom.

LAFARGE (kisses her)
God bless...

ANNA
Oh, he has blessed us, hasn't he?

She shuts her eyes.

The door to TOM's room opens. He lies with his eyes shut. LAFARGE enters and stands over the bed. TOM does not move.

LAFARGE (quietly)
Who are you?

TOM is motionless, but listening.

LAFARGE
You're not Tom. You look like him. I've heard...
Martians do come among us, disguised as Earthmen.
So you're here. And Anna accepts you. She's happy.
And Lord, that makes me happy too.

He turns to stare out at the night window.

LAFARGE
But I want her to stay happy. So I must know the rules.

The boy's lips barely move.

TOM
Rules...?

LAFARGE
Now that you're here, you must never leave.

TOM opens his eyes to look at his father's back there silhouetted against the window. He sits slowly up.

LAFARGE
Tom mustn't die twice. It would kill Anna. I couldn't stand for that. Will you promise, Tom, to stay here from now on?

LAFARGE waits. Silence from the bed.

LAFARGE
Because if you can't promise, then go now, before you hurt us more.

LAFARGE waits and at last turns. The bed is empty. Bare feet run in the hall. The door stands open.

LAFARGE
Tom!

LAFARGE rushes out. Below, the front door lies open. Feet run on the porch.

He rushes down the stairs.

LAFARGE LOOMS at the canal rim.

In the water, the boy swims. He reaches the far bank and climbs out to vanish up the dock steps.

LAFARGE looks over, and speaks, almost to himself.

LAFARGE
Tom...I'm sorry...come back...

The boy runs along the canal rim, growing small.

DISSOLVE TO:

The moons in the sky. LAFARGE seated on the canal rim, whittling a whistle. He looks down at: The flowing moonlit waters. And back at: The silent house. And over at: The far side of the canal and along its empty rim.

Then he goes back to working steadily. Then, a helicopter sounds. Sirens. Faint light.

Flying across the night sky, flushing the canal with great cones of light, a police helicopter and an ambulance helicopter drift fluttering. They hoot. They siren.

LAFARGE watches.

The two craft, high against the stars, go in the direction where TOM was last seen.

They fade, floating down toward a distant ten-shed dwelling.

LAFARGE forces himself to relax, whittling. Suddenly he glances up.

Something flashes along the last few feet of the canal rim across the way, vanishing down the stairs.

LAFARGE pretends not to notice. The whistle is finished. He waits. He blows once.

A small figure stands half down the steps over there.

He blows a second soft note, eyes averted.

The figure is at the bottom of the stairs.

He sounds a third note.

TOM stands on the edge of the dock, pale and frightened.

LAFARGE slowly looks up.

TOM's face implores. It asks to be summoned home.

LAFARGE nods, once.

The boy hits the water. He swims.

LAFARGE's hand is out to pluck him like a silvery fish from the running stream.

Turning, LAFARGE carries him up the dock steps.

CUT TO: the house porch where, cuddling the boy wet against his chest, LAFARGE finds and drapes about him a huge blanket. He sits in the swing with the boy shivering, hidden, nuzzled to his throat.

And holding the boy in the dark, LAFARGE muses over their mutual fate, and we hear his thoughts.

LAFARGE

Who is this, in need of love as much as we? Who is he and what is he that out of loneliness he comes into the alien camp, assumes the face of memory and stands among us, accepted and happy at last. From what small last race of people remaining on this world, from where did he come? (He rocks awhile) Maybe this is wrong to keep Tom but a little while, when nothing can come of it but trouble and sorrow, but how are we to give up the very thing we've wanted... no matter if it stays only a day and is gone, making the emptiness emptier, the dark night darker, and the rainy nights wetter?

They rock a moment longer. From the next house over we hear a radio playing music. Then, at last, another sound.

The helicopters, lights out, sirens dead, fly back toward town.

LAFARGE only half watches them go. Then the radio next door cuts off its music and, dimly floating, we hear a NEWSCASTER:

THE NEWSCASTER

...News...late reports...police and ambulance helicopters...beyond City Limits...along the Central Canal where the death of William Nomland is listed as suicide.

LAFARGE, rocking in the swing, listen, waits.

THE NEWSCASTER
...suicide note was found...Nomland had served a prison term on earth for murder. The suicide note says that only a few hours ago, Nomland believed he saw the man he murdered alive here on Mars. Repeat: Nomland saw the man he killed alive hear his home on the Central Canal. The suicide followed. Police discount...

The radio drifts and murmurs. LAFARGE looks at that far house, and then down at this child he holds in his arms. The boy shivers and begins to cry. LAFARGE holds him close. The CAMERA pulls away to watch them swinging on the porch for a moment before we CUT TO:

Sunset, the next day, on the canal.

In the kitchen, ANNA hands out hampers.

ANNA
You, Tom, this. You, Lafe, this. Where's my hat?

LAFARGE
On your head!

ANNA (grabs her head)
How'd it get <u>there</u>!? Tom, look! You're a mess for town!

She brushes his hair with a brush.

TOM
I don't want to go.

ANNA
Don't want–why?

TOM
I'm afraid...I'll get lost.

LAFARGE
Anna, if the boy doesn't want–

ANNA
Why, tonight's the Illumination! All those brand new lights, the first time the new town's lit up! Did I put the pickles in? Here they are! (She finishes packing the hamper) We haven't gone to town in years. You haven't a stitch to wear, Tom. Lafe, your suit's all green fuzz it's so old. OH, won't it be fine, us drinking pineapple sodas (you always drink pineapple sodas, Tom) Us, the family! walking our legs off! So much we haven't done. Tom! Lafe! March! One-two!

She herds them through the house.

CUT TO: at the canal, the boat drifting in the moonlight.

All three look up from the boat at the moons rising and the town near.

TOM watches the town drift close, his face pale.

LAFARGE looks from his son to ANNA who is fantastically happy.

The boat nudges the dock. TOM flicks his eyes wide.

LAFARGE helps his wife out. She turns to look down.

ANNA
Tom, step lively!

The boy stands reluctant, looking at: The dark town above on the edge of the canal. LAFARGE holds his hand out to the boy, whispering low.

LAFARGE
It's all right, Tom. We'll be with you! Us, the family, the three of us.

TOM hesitates, then steps out.

CUT TO: the three walking in the busy streets of the Frontier town. All about them hovercraft bumble. Above, helicopters sluice the air in great fluttering shadows. The only lights are those which illuminate the interiors of shops. The street lights and the neon lights above the buildings are not lit. Passing, they look into dim places where the only light seems to come from Baal-like juke boxes which squat in the dark playing tapes and records, erupting pure sound that might be music.

TOM, among the parents, begins to relax and look left and right. He feels protected with LAFARGE on one side and ANNA on the other. LAFARGE sees that the boy is beginning to enjoy himself, and tweaks his ear.

A LOUD SPEAKER VOICE
Attention, everyone! Attention!

The crowd stops moving. LAFARGE, ANNA, and TOM stand still.

A LOUD SPEAKER
It is time for this town to really be born. The Illumination! Matches ready, everyone?!

LAFARGE passes out matches to ANNA and TOM.

A LOUD SPEAKER VOICE
At the count of three! One. Two. Three!

All through the town, matches are struck.

TOM strikes his match, gleefully. As do ANNA and LAFARGE. They hold the matches high. As do thousands of others all through the town.

TOM looks around at the faces, all laughing and happy. TOM's face shadows, though his mouth still half-smiles. There is the merest hint of wax melting in his face, as if the flesh might shift and change. He moves closer to his father for protection.

The hands go high on the air with thousands of matches, which signal: The lighting of neon lights on all the businesses through the town. The crowd gasps and cries out with delight and happiness. The town is flooded with colors of cherry and lime and lemon and raspberry from the multicolored neons above the shops. Then, the street lights come on, last of all, and flood the streets.

The matches go out. The people shout and applaud. Juke boxes leap to life. Music floods the town.

And LAFARGE and ANNA, caught in the surge of dancing are swung about, separated.

LAFARGE is SPUN. Halting, he stares.

The place where TOM stood is now empty.

Crowds surge everywhere.

ANNA
Tom? He's gone!

LAFARGE
Anna, you know boys. Always running off. Wait here. Tom!?

ANNA
Don't be too harsh with him, Lafe! Don't–

But LAFARGE is off through the crowd.

LAFARGE
Tom!? Tom!

The crowd swirls round. LAFARGE has to gang his way through. The CAMERA pulls up to look at the dancing, the turnabout people. LAFARGE is lost in the mob.

CUT TO: the same streets, empty. The avenues are littered with confetti. The lights, one by one, are going out.

ANNA sits in the boat, waiting, clenching her hands, looking out at the town.

LAFARGE, near the edge of town, walks wearily. A bar is shutting up. A door clicks. A man steps out and walks along ahead, then, sensing LAFARGE, turns.

MIKE
Lafe! How are you? Quite a night, eh?

LAFARGE
Mike. Quite a night.

They walk together.

MIKE
Celebrations all over! But the biggest of all, did you hear? You know Joe Spaudling, his son Bill? Bill lost on the desert a month ago? Dead, they said, dead. Well, by God now, he came home tonight! Just showed up in the crowd on Main Street middle of the celebration, the Illumination, and there was Bill! Not dead, after all. Can you imagine his folks. What a homecoming! Him alive. What a time they must be having right now–hey–Lafe, where <u>are</u> you going?

For as MIKE has talked on, LAFE has stopped, looked at him, then moved along, separating out. Now he vanishes swiftly into an alley.

MIKE
Lafe?!!

CUT TO: a dark street, with LAFARGE walking at a brisk pace. Only one house is lit ahead, and from it comes voices and music, which draw him. LAFARGE crosses the street and touches a mailbox with the name SPAULDING on it. He looks in it: The festive house, the lights, the voices, the music.

At the door he listens, almost turns away, then rings the bell. The door opens. JOE SPAULDING is there, incredibly happy, perhaps slightly drunk.

SPAULDING
Well for–Lafe! What are you doing–? You must have heard! Come in! Help us celebrate! Mother, look who's here!

He has pulled LAFARGE into the house and along the hall and into a dining room filled with relatives and neighbors.

LAFARGE
I don't want to–

SPAULDING
Alice, Tim, Hank, you know Lafe! Bill, where's Bill! Look at him, Lafe! Oh, isn't it great? God's been good to us. There he is, fitter than when he left home!

The crowd parts. LAFARGE stares.

BILL SPAULDING, taller and at least three years older than TOM, stands there at the far end of the table which is covered with foods. Serpentine hangs from the ceiling.

LAFARGE stands quietly, looking.

BILL turns away.

SPAULDING
Bill, why so shy? You know Lafe–speak up!

SPAULDING reaches to jolly his son and pull him back. Everyone laughs. The boy stands back, eyes down.

LAFARGE
It's all right. It must be quite a night.

SPAULDING
The best night in the history of the world! A toast to that!

LAFARGE finds a glass in his hand. They all lift glasses. BILL SPAULDING stands among them, tall, pale, remote.

LAFARGE (murmuring)
The best night in the history of the world...

They drink. BILL gazes at LAFARGE, helpless, sending a mute message to him, as if TOM were locked inside this strange boy somewhere. LAFARGE backs off.

SPAULDING
Lafe, what? You leaving so soon? Why did you–

LAFARGE
Congratulations is all. Congratulations...

He goes out the door. CUT TO:

The house in the moonlight, the windows darkening. LAFARGE stands hidden in the garden waiting, watching the house lights dim. Clocks chime. Voices sound.

A MAN'S VOICE
God bless. Good night, Willy.

WILLY'S VOICE
Good night, Dad.

LAFARGE hears a door shut up there. A shadow moves by the window. LAFARGE waits. Then, at last, he whispers.

LAFARGE
Tom?

A shadow moves on the windowed balcony. LAFARGE stares up, squints, trying to see.

A boy, his face indistinct in shadow, but larger and older than TOM, looks down.

LAFARGE
Tom, it's me!

The boy pulls back in shadow.

THE BOY
I'm not Tom.
(PAUSE)
We should never come to town.

LAFARGE
You're mother's waiting at the boat..

THE BOY
My mother is here.

LAFARGE
Anna's waiting!

THE BOY
I'm sorry. I'm happy here now. I'm loved, even as you loved me. It's too late. I can't change myself back.

LAFARGE
It's not safe in town, Tom, you know that! It's safe out where we live, with us! We–

THE BOY replies from the shadows above.

THE BOY
I must consider these people now. How would they feel, in the morning, if I was gone again, this time for good? Anyway, the mother knows what I am, she guessed, even as you guessed. I think they all know but don't question. You don't question Providence. If you can't have the reality, a dream is just as good. Perhaps I'm not their dead son back, but I'm something almost better to them; an ideal shaped by their minds. I have a choice of hurting them or your wife.

LAFARGE cuts in.

LAFARGE
I won't let you hurt Anna again. You belong to us! You're my son!

THE BOY (tiredly, sadly)
Please.

But the BOY is moving forward above, drawn, compelled, the shadows flickering on his face.

LAFARGE
Tom, listen. Oh, Tom, slip down the vines, come along. Now. Our home is yours, boy. Yours! Anything you want, we'll give you!

The boy swings a leg over the balustrade, pauses.

LAFARGE
Now. Now!

THE BOY
All right...father.

He slides down.

LAFARGE lifts his hands up, reaching.

Swiftly, in a series of cuts, we see BILL SPAULDING slide down the vine, down, down, and with each cut change size, shape, color of hair and eyes and drop as Tom, LAFARGE'S son, into his arms.

Lights flash on above. A voice cries.

THE VOICE
Who's there? Willy? Will?!

LAFARGE
Tom, the canal, the boat! You one way. Me the other! Run!

THE VOICE
Stop! I'm armed! Stop!

TOM and LAFARGE leap out through the garden.

A gun blazes above, twice, three times, but LAFARGE is gone.

CUT TO: ANNA, in the boat, waiting. THE CAMERA pulls back to find LAFARGE standing near. She speaks.

ANNA
Why doesn't he come?

LAFARGE
He'll come. I know he will.

Then, both hear something, and start up and forward. It is the sound of a number of people, a long way off, murmuring, running.

LAFARGE moves slowly up the dock stepway, and as he moves the far running sound grows louder, and the calls and shouts of men.

As he reaches the top and looks along the level toward the main street, he sees:

Very far away there on the moonlit avenue, the figure of a boy, running.

LAFARGE steps up, swiftly, and begins to run himself, toward that boy, when:

Behind the boy, a hundred yards back, people begin to appear, following, running.

And the boy is TOM, very tired, wheeling, stumbling, almost falling.

A man here, another man there, a woman, and still another man, looking ahead, running:

See TOM run one shape and size, then another shape and size, his hair one color to one, another color to another.

TOM falls.

LAFARGE gasps and leaps ahead.

The others race, circling in.

TOM lies, sprawled.

The people run to stand over him, hands out, beseeching.

INTERCUT we see their faces bending over, their eyes wild with love and need.

Their hunger is immense. They call the names of lost loved ones. They babble. They cry. They blot out the stars.

TOM yells and scuttles back from hands that seize. The hands plunge down. The faces hover.

TOM stares up, his face melting to many things, his hair now brown, now black, one eye blue, the other brown. He kicks. He tries to thrash up, yelling.

LAFARGE bursts through. He strikes. He fends off one man. He knocks another sprawling. He stands over TOM. TOM looks up at him, stricken, weeping, torn, his hands bleeding.

LAFARGE
Oh God, Tom. Run!

TOM scuttles, jumps, runs. The crowd cries out. LAFARGE jumps to stand between TOM and them.
They freeze. LAFARGE sees the boy vanish around a corner, then turns to hold them a moment longer, anguished and in anger.

CUT TO: a lonely street. A church front.

Far down the street, TOM running.

Inside the church, candlelight.

In his study, working late, FATHER PEREGRINE hears the outside door shut. He only half listens, taking for granted whoever may have entered.

Lying against the church front door, inside, THE BOY, shadowed, listens to the approaching murmur of the crowd. Then he turns to see the eternal twilight of this lovely small frontier church. The altar, the pews, and, to his left, the baptismal alcove. The boy moves.

Candle flames flutter nearby in a shrine.

PEREGRINE, busy again over his notes, talks to the church, gently.

PEREGRINE
Reverend? How we <u>do</u> forget to remind people: there were <u>two</u> Last Suppers, eh? Two.
(he rises)
The one we all talk about, with Judas, and then–

The BOY moves in the twilight hush, shadowed, hidden, as PEREGRINE's voice speaks quietly from the study.

PEREGRINE'S VOICE
...after Christ died and was resurrected, remember Simon and and the others met his Ghost by the shore of Galilee?

.PEREGRINE seems not to notice he has had no response from the person outside whom he takes to be REV. WISWELL, but, strolling, peering at his notes, goes on.

PEREGRINE
And Christ's Ghost, at Galilee, fed them a second feast, the miraculous fish on a bed of coals on the nighttime and lonely shore...Christ's Ghost...at Galilee...

In the Church, a motion of shadows.

Slowly, FATHER PEREGRINE turns to peer through the door toward the altar.

Somewhere, robes stir. There is a soft ripple as feet rush to hide.

Hearing this, PEREGRINE steps out into the Church proper.
From the altar, the CAMERA looks down to see PEREGRINE apprehensive in the aisle below.

PEREGRINE
Who's there?

From the baptistery, water strikes, drop by drop, into water PEREGRINE hears. He turns. Another drop strikes. PEREGRINE approaches. Dimly he sees a figure within the alcove.

There is a faint luminescence within the baptistery. A figure, dimly illumed, stands there.

PEREGRINE, cold with astonishment, sees:

The figure alone within the baptistery. One of its hands is raised out over the fount. From the palm two drops fall and echo.

PEREGRINE stares.

CLOSEUP, we see the bright clear full eyes of the MAN trapped here in a new shape, looking curiously down at:

His outstretched palm which, wounded, bleeds.

The drops of blood echo in the fount.

PEREGRINE sees this.

THE MAN looks down at the miracle of his own bleeding palm.

The fount water echoes.

And PEREGRINE at last groans with the agony of this encounter, this visitation. He reaches out toward the figure in the baptistery.

THE MAN's hand, wounded, jumps back out of sight.

As the front door of the church opens. LAFARGE enters, looks about, and sees:

PEREGRINE, half fallen against the wall, his face in an agony of indecision.

And beyond: the dim whiteness, the Presence in the alcove.

LAFARGE locks the door, and moves.

PEREGRINE does not look at him, but only into the dim room with terrible love and fascination. LAFARGE now stands behind the Priest, sensing the PERSON there in the dark baptistery.

LAFARGE
Father...Let him go.

PEREGRINE
Just a moment longer!!

LAFARGE
Let him go.

LAFARGE dares step past the Priest to the door of the baptistery.

LAFARGE pauses, stares at the dark, then turns to hurry along the aisle to the back door of the church. He opens it and looks out. The alley there is empty.

PEREGRINE hears a stir in the baptistery.

LAFARGE waits, strained.

LAFARGE
Father! Look away!

PEREGRINE cannot tear his eyes from this miracle.

LAFARGE protests.

LAFARGE
Please, Father!

PEREGRINE at last averts his gaze. The shadow moves.

LAFARGE, at the back of the church, averts his gaze and moves half behind the door so he does not look directly at the baptistery.

There is a rustling, a touch of robes near PEREGRINE. His face is shadowed. A hand touches his arm. PEREGRINE trembles and shuts his eyes.

LAFARGE waits.

The church whispers with the shadow of someone passing.

A hand touches LAFARGE. It is again the hand of a boy.

LAFARGE, turned away, can hardly speak.

LAFARGE
Tom. Goodbye.

The hand falls away. The door slams. LAFARGE leans to it, hearing: the sound of feet running off into the dark, gone.

PEREGRINE, inside the baptistery, looks down.

At the baptismal fount where the blood is vanishing from the clear water.

LAFARGE slowly opens the front door, stands, goes out, and shuts it.

LAFARGE opens the front door and goes out into the crowd. ANNA stands at the far edge of the crowd.

LAFARGE walks through them. They look away. They begin, shamefaced, to disperse.

ANNA and LAFARGE move down the canal steps.

They get into their boat.

The boat moves away down the canal, the two of them in it, huddled together, growing small, small, until the boat is lost under the stars and the canal waters run quiet and deep and we DISSOLVE TO DARKNESS.

FADE IN:

A date.

A title.

JULY, 2015 A.D.

"THE CITY"

DISSOLVE TO:

The great eye floated in space. And behind the great eye somewhere hidden away within metal and machinery was a small eye which belonged to a man who looked and could not stop looking at all the multitudes of stars and the diminishings and growings of light a billion billion miles away.

The small eye closed with tiredness. Captain John Wilder stood holding to the telescopic devices which probed the Universe and at last murmured, "Which one?"

The astronomer with him said, "Take your pick."

"I wish it were that easy." Wilder opened his eyes. "What's the data on this star?"

"Alpha-Cygne II. Same size and reading as our sun. Planetary system, possible."

"Possible. Not certain. If we pick the wrong star, God help the people we send on a two-hundred-year journey to find a planet that may not be there. No, God help me, for the final selection is mine, and I may well send myself on that Journey. So, how can we be sure?"

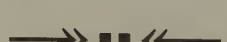
"We can't. We just make the best guess, send our starship out, and pray."

"You are not very encouraging. That's it. I'm tired."

Wilder touched a switch that shut up tight the greater eye, this rocket-powered space lens that stained cold upon the abyss, saw far too much and knew little, and now knew nothing. The rocket laboratory drifted sightless on an endless night.

"Home," said the captain. "Let's go home."

And the blind beggar-after-stars wheeled on a spread of fire and ran away.



The frontier cities on Mars looked very fine from above. Coming down for a landing, Wilder saw the neons among the blue hills and thought, we'll light those worlds a billion miles off, and the children of the people living under those lights this instant, we'll make them immortal. Very simply, if we succeed, they will live forever.

Live forever. The rocket landed. Live forever.

The wind that blew from the frontier town smelled of grease. An aluminum-toothed jukebox banged somewhere. A junkyard rusted beside the rocketport. Old newspapers danced alone on the windy tarmac.

Wilder, motionless at the top of the gantry elevator, suddenly wished not to move down. The lights suddenly had become people and not words that, huge in the mind, could be handled with elaborate ease.

He sighed. The freight of people was too heavy. The stars were too far away.

"Captain?" said someone behind him.

He stepped forward. The elevator gave way. They sank with a silent screaming toward a very real land with real people in it, who were waiting for him to choose.

At midnight the telegram-bin hissed and exploded out a message projectile. Wilder, at his desk, surrounded by tapes and computation cards, did not touch it for a long while. When at last he pulled the message out, he scanned it, rolled it in a tight ball, then uncrumpled the message and read again:

FINAL CANAL BEING FILLED TOMORROW WEEK. YOU ARE INVITED CANAL YACHT PARTY. DISTINGUISHED GUESTS. FOUR DAY JOURNEY TO SEARCH FOR LOST CITY. KINDLY ACKNOWLEDGE. I. V. AARONSON.

Wilder blinked, and laughed quietly. He crumpled the paper again, but stopped, lifted the telephone and. said:

"Telegram to I. V. Aaronson, Mars City I. Answer affirmative. No sane reason why, but still—affirmative."

And hung up the phone. To sit for a long while watching this night which shadowed all the whispering, ticking, and motioning machines.

The dry canal waited.

It had been waiting twenty thousand years for nothing but dust to filter through in ghost tides.

Now, quite suddenly, it whispered.

And the whisper became a rush and wall-caroming glide of waters.

As if a vast machined fist had struck the rocks somewhere, clapped the air and cried "Miracle!", a wall of water came proud and high along the channels, and lay down in all the dry places of the canal and moved on toward ancient deserts of dry-bone

surprising old wharves and lifting up the skeletons of boats abandoned 30 centuries before when the water burnt away to nothing.

The tide turned a corner and lifted up—a boat as fresh as the morning itself, with new-minted silver screws and brass pipings, and bright new Earth-sewn flags. The boat, suspended from the side of the canal, bore the name Aaronson I.

Inside the boat, a man with the same name smiled. Mr. Aaronson sat listening to the waters live under the boat.

And the sound of the water was cut across by the sound of a hovercraft, arriving, and a motorbike, arriving, and in the air, as if summoned with magical timing, drawn by the glimmer of tides in the old canal, a number of gadfly people flew over the hills on jet-pack machines, and hung suspended as if doubting this collision of lives caused by one rich man.

Scowling up with a smile, the rich man called to his children, cried them in from the heat with offers of food and drink.

"Captain Wilder! Mr. Parkhill! Mr. Beaumont!"

Wilder set his hovercraft down.

Sam Parkhill discarded his motorbike, for he had seen the yacht and it was a new love.

"My God," cried Beaumont, the actor, part of the frieze of people in the sky dancing like bright bees on the wind, "I've timed my entrance wrong. I'm early. There's no audience!"

"I'll applaud you down!" shouted the old man, and did so, then added, "Mr. Aikens!"

"Aikens?" said Parkhill. "The big-game hunter?"

"None other!"

And Aikens dived down as if to seize them in his harrying claws. He fancied his resemblance to the hawks. He was finished and stropped like a razor by the swift life he had lived. Not an edge of him but cut the air as he fell, a strange plummeting vengeance upon people who had done nothing to him. In the moment before destruction, he pulled up on his jets and, gently screaming, simmered himself to touch the marble jetty. About his lean middle hung a rifle belt. His pockets bulged like those of a boy from the candy store. One guessed he was washed with sweet bullets and rare bombs. In his hands, like an evil child, he held a weapon that looked like a bolt of lightning

fallen straight from the clutch of Zeus, stamped nevertheless: made U.S.A. His face was sunblasted dark. His eyes were cool surprises in the sunwrinkled flesh, all mint-blue-green crystal. He wore a white porcelain smile set in African sinews. The earth did not quite tremble as he landed.

"The lion prowls the land of Judah!" cried a voice from the heavens. "Now do behold the lambs driven forth to slaughter!"

"Oh for God's sake, Harry, shut up!" said a woman's voice.

And two more kites fluttered their souls their dread humanity on the wind.

The rich man jubilated.

"Harry Harpwell!"

"Behold the angel of the Lord who comes with Annunciations!" the man in the sky said, hovering. "And the Annunciation is–"

"He's drunk again," his wife supplied, flying ahead of him, not looking back.

"Megan Harpwell," said the rich man, like an entrepreneur-introducing his troupe.

"The poet," said Wilder.

"And the poet's barracuda wife," muttered Parkhill.

"I am not drunk," the poet shouted down the wind. "I am simply high."

And here he let loose such a deluge of laughter that those below almost raised their hands to ward off the avalanche.

Lowering himself, like a fat dragon-kite, the poet, whose wife's mouth was now clamped shut, bumbled over the yacht. He made the motions of blessing same, and winked at Wilder and Parkhill.

"Harpwell," he called. "Isn't that a name to go with being a great modern poet who suffers in the present, lives in the past, steals bones from old dramatists' tombs, and flies on this new egg-beater wind-suck device, to call down sonnets on your head? I pity the old euphoric saints and angels who had no invisible wings like this so as to dart in oriole convolutions and ecstatic convulsions on the air as they sang their lines or damned souls to Hell. Poor earthbound sparrows, wings clipped. Only their genius flew. Only their Muse knew airsickness–"

"Harry," said his wife, her feet on the ground, eyes shut.

"Hunter!" called the poet. "Aikens! Here's the greatest game in all the world, a poet on the wing. I bare my breast. Let fly your honeyed bee-sting! Bring me, Icarus, down, if your gun be sunbeams kindled in one tube and let free in a single forest fire that escalates the sky and turns tallow, mush, candlewick and lyre to mere tarbaby. Ready, aim, fire!"

The hunter, in good humor, raised his gun.

The poet, at this, laughed a mightier laugh and, literally, exposed his chest by tearing aside his shirt.

At which moment a quietness came along the canal rim.

A woman appeared walking. Her maid walked behind her. There was no vehicle in sight, and it seemed almost as if they had wandered a long way out of the Martian hills and now stopped.

The very quietness of her entrance gave dignity and attention to Cara Corelli.

The poet shut up his lyric in the sky and landed.

The company all looked together at this actress who gazed back without seeing them. She was dressed in a black jumpsuit which was the same color as her dark hair. She walked like a woman who has spoken little in her life and now stood facing them with the same quietness, as if waiting for someone to move without being ordered. The wind blew her hair out and down over her shoulders. The paleness of her face was shocking. Her paleness, rather than her eyes, stared at them.

Then, without a word, she stepped down into the yacht and sat in the front of the craft, like a figurehead which knots its place and goes there.

The moment of silence was over.

Aaronson ran his finger down his printed guest list.

"An actor, a beautiful woman who happens to be an actress, a hunter, a poet, a poet's wife, a rocket captain, a former technician. All aboard!"

On the afterdeck of the huge craft, Aaronson spread forth his maps.

"Ladies, gentlemen," he said. "This is more than a four-day drinking bout, party, excursion. This is a Search!"

He waited for their faces to light, properly, and for them to glance from his eyes to the charts, and then said:

"We are seeking the fabled lost City of Mars, once called Dia-Sao. The City of Doom, it was called. Something terrible about it. The inhabitants fled as from a plague. The City left empty. Still empty now, centuries later."

"We," said Captain Wilder, "have charted, trapped, and cross-indexed every acre of land on Mars in the last fifteen years. You can't mislay a city the size of the one you speak of."

"True," said Aaronson, "you've mapped it from the sky, from the land. But you have not charted it via water! For the canals have been empty until now! So now we shall take the new waters that fill this last canal and go where the boats once went in the olden days, and see the very last new things that need to be seen on Mars." The rich man continued: "And somewhere on our traveling, as sure as the breath in our mouths, we shall find the most beautiful, the most fantastic, the most awful city in the history of this old world. And walk in that city and–who knows?–find the reason why the Martians ran screaming away from it, as the legend says, ten thousand years ago."

Silence. Then:

"Bravo! Well done." The poet shook the old's hand.

"And in that city," said Aikens, the hunter, "mightn't there be weapons the like of which we've never seen?"

"Most likely, sir."

"Well." The hunter cradled his bolt of lightning. "I was bored of Earth, shot every animal, ran fresh out of beasts, and came here looking for newer, better, more dangerous man-eaters of any size or shape. Plus, now, new weapons! what more can one ask? Fine!"

And he dropped his blue-silver lightning bolt over the side. It sank in the clear water, bubbling.

"Let's get the hell out of here."

"Let us, indeed," said Aaronson, "get the good hell out."

And he pressed the button that launched the yacht.

And the water flowed the yacht away.

And the yacht went in the direction toward which Cara Corelli's quiet paleness was pointed: beyond.

As the poet opened the first champagne bottle the cork banged. Only the hunter did not jump.

The yacht sailed steadily through the day into night. They found an ancient ruin and had dinner there and a good wine imported, one hundred million miles from Earth. It was noted that it had traveled well.

With the wine came the poet, and after quite a bit of the poet, came sleep on board the yacht which moved away in search of a City that would not as yet be found.

At three in the morning, restless, unaccustomed to the gravity of a planet pulling at all of his body and not freeing him to dream, Wilder came out on the afterdeck of the yacht and found the actress there.

She was watching the waters slip by in dark revelations and discardments of stars.

He sat beside her and thought a question.

Just as silently, Cara Corelli asked herself the same question, and answered it.

"I am here on Mars because not long ago for the first time in my life, a man told me the truth."

Perhaps she expected surprise. Wilder said nothing. The boat moved as on a stream of soundless oil.

"I am a beautiful woman. I have been beautiful all of my life. Which means that from the start people lied because they simply wished to be with me. I grew up surrounded by the untruths of men, women and children who could not risk my displeasure. When beauty pouts, the world trembles.

"Have you ever seen a beautiful woman surrounded by men, seen them nodding, nodding? Heard their laughter? Men will laugh at anything a beautiful woman says. Hate themselves, yes, but they will laugh, say no for yes and yes for no.

"Well, that's how it was every day of every year for me. A crowd of liars stood between me and anything unpleasant. Their words dressed me in silks.

"But quite suddenly, oh, no more than six weeks ago, this man told one a truth. It was a small thing. I don't remember now what it was he said. But he didn't laugh. He didn't even smile.

"And no sooner was it out and over, the words spoken, that I knew a terrible thing had happened.

"I was growing old."

The yacht rocked gently on the tide.

"Oh, there would be more men who would, lying, smile again at what I said. But I saw the years ahead, when Beauty could no longer stomp its small foot, and shake down earthquakes, make cowardice a custom among otherwise good men.

"The man? He took back his truth immediately, when he saw that he had shocked me. But it was too late. I bought a one-way fare to Mars. Aaronson's invitation, when I arrived, put me on this new journey that will end...who knows where."

Wilder found that during this last he had reached out and taken her hand.

"No," she said, withdrawing. "No word. No touch. No pity. No self-pity." She smiled for the first time. "Isn't it strange? I always thought, wouldn't it be nice, some day, to hear the truth, to give up the masquerade? How wrong I was. It's no fun at all."

She sat and watched the black waters pour by the boat. When she thought to look again, some hours later, the seat beside her was empty. Wilder was gone.

On the second day, letting the new eaters take them where it wished to go, they sailed toward a high range of mountains and lunched, on the way, in an old shrine, and had dinner that night in a further ruin. The Lost City was not much talked about. They were sure it would never be found.

But on the third day, without anyone's saying, they felt the approach of a great Presence.

It was the poet who finally put it in words.

"Is God humming under His breath somewhere?"

"What a fierce scum you are," said his wife. "Can't you speak plain English even when you gossip?"

"Dammit, listen!" cried the poet.

So they listened.

"Don't you feel as if you stood on the threshold of a giant blast-furnace kitchen and inside somewhere, all comfortably warm, vast hands flour-gloved, smelling of wondrous tripes and miraculous viscera, bloodied and proud of the blood, somewhere God cooks out the dinnertime of Life? In that cauldron sun, a brew to make the flowering forth of life on Venus, in that vat a stewbroth of bones and nervous heart to run in animals on planets ten billion light-years gone. And isn't God content at His fabulous workings in the great kitchen Universe, where He has menu'd out a history of feasts, famines, deaths and reburgeonings for a billion billion years? And if God be content, would He not hum under His breath? Feel your bones. Aren't the marrows teeming with that hum? For that matter, God not only hums, He sings in the elements. He dances in molecules. Eternal celebration swarms us. Something is Near. Sh."

He pressed his fat finger to his pouting lips.

And now all were silent, and Cara Corelli's paleness searchlighted the darkening waters ahead.

They all felt it. Wilder did. Parkhill did. They smoked to cover it. They put the smokes out. They waited in the dusk.

And the humming grew nearer. And the hunter, smelling it, went to join the silent actress at the bow of the yacht. And the poet sat to write out the words he had spoken.

"Yes," he said, as the stars came out. "It's almost upon us. It has." He took a breath. "Arrived."

The yacht passed into a tunnel.

The tunnel went under a mountain.

And the City was there.

It was a city within a hollow mountain with its own meadows surrounding it and its own strangely colored and illumined stone sky above it. And it had been lost and remained lost for the simple reason that people had tried flying to discover it or had unraveled roads to find it, when all the while the canals which led to it stood waiting for simple walkers to tread where once waters had tread.

And now the yacht filled with strange people from another planet touched an ancient wharf.

And the City stirred.

In the old days, cities were alive or dead if there were or were not people in them. It was that simple. But in the later days of life on Earth or Mars, cities did not die. They slept. And in their dreamful coggeries and enwheeled slumbers they remembered how once it was or how it might be again.

So as, one by one, the party filed out on the dock, they felt a great personage, the hidden, oiled, the metalled and shining soul of the metropolis slide in a landfall of muted and hidden fireworks toward becoming fully awake.

The weight of the new people on the dock caused a machined exhalation. They felt themselves on a delicate scales. The dock sank a millionth of an inch.
And the City, the cumbrous Sleeping Beauty of a nightmare device, sensed this touch, this kiss, and slept no more.

Thunder.

In a wall a hundred feet high stood a gate seventy feet wide. This gate, in two parts, now rumbled back, to hide within the wall.

Aaronson stepped forward.

Wilder moved to intercept him. Aaronson sighed.

"Captain, no advice, please. No warnings. No patrols going on ahead to flush out villains. The City wants us in. It welcomes us. Surely you don't imagine anything's alive in there? It's a robot place. And don't look as if you think it's a time bomb. It hasn't seen fun and games in–what?–twenty centuries! Do you read Martian hieroglyphs? That cornerstone. The City was built at least 19 hundred years ago."

"And abandoned," said Wilder.

"You male it sound like a plague drove them–"

"Not a plague," Wilder stirred uneasily, feeling himself weighed on the great scales sunk beneath his feet. "Something. Something..."

"Let's find out! In, all of you!"

Singly, and in pairs, the people from Earth stepped over the threshold.

Wilder, last of all, stepped across.

And the City came more alive.

The metal roofs of the City sprang wide like the petals of a flower.

Windows flicked wide like the lids of vast eyes to stare down upon them.

A river of sidewalks gently purled and washed at their feet, machined creekways which gleamed off through the City.

Aaronson gazed at the metal tides with pleasure. "Well, by God, the burden's off me! I was going to picnic you all. But that's the City's business now. Meet you back here in two hours to compare notes! Here goes!"

And saying this he leapt out on the scurrying silver carpet which treaded him swiftly away.

Wilder, alarmed, moved to follow. But Aaronson cried jovially back:

"Come on in, the water's fine!"

And the metal river whisked him, waving, off.

And one by one they stepped forward and the moving sidewalk drifted then away. Parkhill, the hunter, the poet and his wife, the actor, and then the beautiful woman and her maid. They floated like statues mysteriously borne on volcanic fluids which swept them anywhere, or nowhere, they could only guess.

Wilder jumped. The river seized his boots gently. Following, he went away into the avenues and around the bends of parks and through fiords of buildings.

And behind them, the dock and the gate stood empty. There was no trace to show they had arrived. It was almost as if they had never been.

Beaumont, the actor, was the first to leave the traveling pathway. A certain building caught his eye. And the text thing he knew, he had leapt off and edged near, sniffing.

He smiled.

For now he knew what kind of building he stood before because of the odor which drifted from it.

"Brass polish. And, by God, that means only one thing!"

Theatre.

Brass doors, brass rails, brass rings on the velvet curtains.

He opened the door of the building and stepped in. He sniffed and laughed aloud.. Yes. Without a sign or a light, the smell alone, the special chemistry of metals and dust torn free of a million tickets.

And above all...he listened. The silence.

"The silence that waits. No other silence in the world waits. Only in a theatre will you find that. The very particles of air chafe themselves in readiness. The shadows sit back and hold their breath. Well...ready or not...here I come...."

The lobby was green velvet undersea.

The theatre itself: Red velvet undersea, only dimly perceived as he opened the double doors. Somewhere beyond was a stage.

Something shuddered like a great beast. His breath had dreamt it alive. The air from his half-opened mouth caused the curtains one hundred feet away to softly furl and unfurl in darkness like all-covering wings.

Hesitantly, he took a step.

A light began to appear everywhere in a high ceiling where a school of miraculous prism fish swam upon themselves.

The oceanarium light played everywhere. He gasped.

The theatre was full of people.

A thousand people sat motionless in the false dusk. True, they were small, fragile, rather dark, they wore silver masks, yet–people!

He knew, without asking, they had sat here for ten thousand years.

Yet they were not dead.

They were–he reached out a hand. He tapped the wrist of a man seated on the aisle.

The hand tinkled quietly.

He touched the shoulder of a woman. She chimed. Like a bell.

Yes, they had waited a few thousand years. But then, machines have a property of waiting.

He took a further step and froze.

For a sigh had passed over the crowd.

It was like the sound, the first small sound a newborn babe must make in the moment before it really sucks, bleats and shocks out its wailing surprise at being alive.

A thousand such sighs faded in the velvet portieres.

Beneath the masks, hadn't a thousand mouths drifted ajar?

Two moved. He stopped.

Two thousand eyes blinked wide in the velvet dusk.

He moved again.

A thousand silent heads wheeled on their ancient but well-oiled cogs.

They looked at him.

An unquenchable cold ran wild in him.

He turned to run.

But their eyes would not let him go.

And, from the orchestra pit: music.

He looked and saw, slowly rising, an insect agglomeration of instruments, all strange, all grotesquely acrobatic in their configurations. These were being softly thrummed, piped, touched, and massaged in tune.

The audience, with a motion, turned their gaze to the stage.

A light flashed on. The orchestra struck a grand fanfare chord.

The red curtains parted. A spotlight fixed itself to front center, blazing upon an empty dais where sat an empty chair.

Beaumont waited.
No actor appeared.

A stir. Several hands were lifted to left and right. The hands came together. They beat softly in applause.

Now the spotlight wandered off the stage, and up the aisle.

The heads of the audience turned to follow the empty ghost of light. The masks glinted softly. The eyes behind the masks beckoned with warm color.

Beaumont stepped back.

But the light came steadily. It painted the floor with a blunt cone of pure whiteness.

And stopped, nibbling, at his feet.

The audience, turned, applauded even louder now. The theatre banged, roared, ricocheted with their ceaseless tide of approbation.

Everything dissolved within him, from cold to warm. He felt as if he had been thrust raw into a downpour of summer rain. The storm rinsed him with gratitude. His heart jumped in great compulsive beats. His fists let go of themselves. His skeleton relaxed. He waited a moment longer, with the rain drenching over his upthrust and thankful cheeks and hammering his hungry eyelids so they fluttered to lock against themselves, and then he felt himself, like a ghost on battlements, led by ghost light, lean, step, drift, move, down and along the incline, sliding to beautiful ruin, now no longer walking but striding, not striding but in full-tilted run, and the masks glittering, the eyes hot with delight and fantastic welcoming, the flights of hands on the disturbed air in upflung dove-winged rifle-shot flight. He felt the steps collide with his shoes. The applause slammed to a shutdown.

He swallowed. Then slowly he ascended the steps and stood in the full light with a thousand masks fixed to him and two thousand eyes watchful, and he sat in the empty chair, and the theatre grew darker, and the immense hearth-bellow breathing softer out of the lyre-metal throats, and there was only the sound of a mechanical beehive thrived with machinery-musk in the dark.

He held to his knees. He let go. And at last he spoke:

"To be or not to be–"

The silence was complete.

Not a cough. Not a stir. Not a rustle. Not a blink. All waited. Perfection. The perfect audience. Perfect, forever and forever. Perfect. Perfect.

He tossed his words slowly into that perfect pond and felt the soundless ripples disperse and gentle away.

"–that is the question."

He talked. They listened. He knew that they would never let him go now. They would beat him insensible with applause. He would sleep a child's sleep and rise to speak again. All of Shakespeare, all of Shaw, all of Moliere, every bit, crumb, lump, joint and piece. Himself in repertory!

He arose to finish.

Finished, he thought: bury me! Cover me! Smother me deep!

Obediently, the avalanche came down: the mountain.

Cara Corelli found a palace of mirrors.

The maid remained outside.

And Cara Corelli went in.

As she walked through a maze, the mirrors took away a day, and then a week, and then a month and then a year and then two years of time from her face.

It was a palace of splendid and soothing lies. It was like being young once more. It was being surrounded by all those tall bright glass mirror men who would never again in your life tell you the truth.

Cara walked to the center of the palace. By the time she stopped she saw herself twenty-five years old, in every tall bright mirror face.

She sat down in the middle of the bright maze. She beamed around in happiness.

The maid waited outside for perhaps an hour. And then she went away.

This was a dark place with shapes and sizes as yet unseen. It smelled of lubricating oil, the blood of tyrant lizards with cogs and wheels for teeth, which lay strewn and silent in the dark waiting.

A titan's door slowly gave a slithering roar like a swept-back armored tail, and Parkhill stood in the rich oily wind blowing out around him. He felt as if someone had pasted a white flower on his face. But it was only a sudden surprise of a smile.

His empty hands hung at his sides and they made impulsive and completely unconscious gestures forward. They beggared the air. So, paddling silently, he let himself be moved into the Garage, Machine Shop, Repair Shed, whatever it was.

And filled with holy delight and a child's holy and unholy glee at what he beheld, he walked and slowly turned.

For as far as his eye could see stood vehicles.

Vehicles that ran on the earth. Vehicles that flew in the air. Vehicles that stood ready with wheels to go in any direction. Vehicles with two wheels. Vehicles with three or four or six or eight. Vehicles that looked like butterflies. Vehicles that resembled ancient motorbikes. Three thousand stood ranked here, four thousand glinted ready there. Another thousand were tilted over, wheels off, viscera exposed, waiting to be repaired. Still another thousand were lifted high on spidery repair hoists, their lovely undersides revealed to view, their discs and tubes and coggeries all intricate and fine and needful of touching, unbolting, re-valving, rewiring, oiling, delicately lubricating....

Parkhill's palms itched.
He walked forward through the primeval smell of swamp oils among the dead and waiting to be revived ancient but new armored mechanical reptiles, and the more he looked the more he ached his grin.

The City was a city all right, and, to a point, self-sustaining. But, eventually, the rarest butterflies of metal gossamer, gaseous oil and fiery dream sank to earth, the machines that repaired the machines that repaired the machines grew old, ill and damaging of themselves. Here then was the Bestial Garage, the slumbrous Elephants Boneyard where the aluminum dragons drawled rusting out their souls, hopeful of one live person left among so much active but dead metal, that person to put

things right. One God of the machines to say, you Lazarus-elevator, rise up! You hovercraft, be reborn! And anoint them with leviathan oils, tap them with magical wrench and send them forth to almost eternal lives in and on the air and above the quicksilver paths.

Parkhill moved among 900 robot men and women slaughtered by simple corrosion. He would cure their rust.

He passed a hundred electro-television eyes that lay stunned, disfocused, their lidless gaze all gummed to cataract. These blind would see again!

No. If he started now, thought Parkhill, rolling up his sleeves, and staring off down a corridor of machines that ran waiting for a solid mile of garage, shed, hoist, lift, storage bin, oil-tank and strewn shrapnel of tools glittering and ready for his grip; if he started now, he might work his way to the end of the giant's ever-constant garage, accident, collision and repair works shed in thirty years!

A billion bolts to be tightened. A billion motors to be tinkered! A billion iron tripes to lie under, a grand oil-dripped-upon orphan, alone, alone, alone with the always beautiful and never talking back hummingbird-commotion devices, accoutrements and miraculous contraptions.

His hands weighed him toward the tools. He clutched a wrench. He found a forty-wheeled low running sled. He lay down on it. He sculled the garage in a long whistling ride. The sled scuttled.

Parkhill vanished beneath a great car of some ancient design.

Out of sight, you could hear him working on the gut of the machine. On his back, he talked up at it. And when he slapped it to life, at last, the machine talked back.

Always the silver pathways ran somewhere.

Thousands of years now they had run empty, carrying only dust to destinations away and sway among the high and dreaming buildings.

Now, on one traveling path, Aaronson came borne like an aging statue.

And the more the road propelled him, the faster the City exposed itself to his view, the more buildings that passed, the more parks that sprang into sight, the more his smile faded. His color changed.

"Toy," he heard himself whisper. The whisper was ancient. "Just another," and here his voice grew so small it faded away, "...another Toy."

A super-Toy, yes. But his life was full of such and had always been so. If it was not some slot machine it was the next-size dispenser or a jumbo-size razzmatazz hi-fi stereo speaker. From a lifetime of handling metallic sandpaper, he felt his arms rubbed away to a nub. Mere pips, his fingers. No, handless, and lacking wrists, Aaronson, the Seal Boy!!! His mindless flippers clapped applause to a city that was, in reality, no more and no less than an economy-size jukebox ravening under its idiot breath. And–he knew the tune! God help him, he knew the tune.

He blinked just once.

An inner eyelid came down like cold steel.

He turned and tread the silver waters of the path.

He found a moving river of steel to take him back toward the Great Gate itself.

On the way, he met the Corelli maid, wandering lost on her own silver stream.

As for the poet and his wife, their running battle tore echoes everywhere. They cried down thirty avenues, cracked panes in two hundred shops, battered leaves from seventy varieties of park bush and tree, and only ceased when drowned by a thundering fountain display they passed like a rise of clear fireworks upon the metropolitan air.

"The whole thing is," said his wife, punctuating one of his dirtier responses, "you only came along so you could lay hands on the nearest woman and spray her ears with bad breath and worse poetry."

The poet muttered a foul word.

"You're worse than the actor," said his wife. "Always at it. Don t you ever shut up?"

"Don't you?" he cried. "Ah God, I've curdled inside. Shut up, woman, or I'll throw myself in the founts!"

"N. You haven't bathed in years. You're the pig of the centuryl Your picture will grace the Swine Herder's Annual next month!"

"That did it!"

Doors slammed on a building.

By the time she got off and ran back and fisted the doors, they were locked.

"Coward!" she shrieked. "Open up!"

A foul word came echoing out, dimly.

"Ah, listen to that sweet silence," he whispered, to himself, in the great shelled ark.

Harpwell found himself in a soothing hugeness, a vast womblike building, over which hung a canopy of pure serenity, a starless void.

In the middle of this room which was roughly a two-hundred-foot circle stood a device, a machine. In this machine were dials and rheostats and switches, a seat, and a steering wheel.

"What kind of vehicle is this?" whispered the poet, but edged near, and bent to touch. "Christ-off-the-cross and bearing mercy, it smells of what? Blood and mere guts? No, for it's clean as a virgin's frock. Still it does fill the nose. Violence. Simple destruction. I can feel the damn carcass tremble like a nervous highbred hound. It's full of stuffs. Let's try a swig."

He sat in the machine.

"What do I twig first? This?"

He snapped a switch.

The baskerville-hound machine whimpered in its dog slumberings.

"Good beast." He flicked another switch. "How do you go, brute? When the damn device is in full tilt, where to? You lack wheels. Well, surprise me. I dare."

The machine shivered.

The machine bolted.

It ran. It dashed.

He held tight to the steering wheel.

"Holy God!"

For he was on a highway, racing fast.

Air sluiced by. The sky flashed over in running colors.

The speedometer read seventy, eighty.

And the highway ribboned away ahead, flashing toward him. Invisible wheels slapped and banged on an increasingly rough road.

Far away, ahead, a car appeared.

It was running fast. And–

"It's on the wrong side of the road! Do you see that, wife? The wrong side."

Then he realized his wife was not here.

He was alone in a car racing–ninety miles an hour now–toward another car racing at a similar speed.

He veered the wheel.

His vehicle moved to the left.

Almost instantly the other car did a compensating move, and ran back over to the left.

"The damn fool, what does he think–where's the blasted brake?"

He stomped the floor. There was no brake. Here was a strange machine indeed. One that ran as fast as you wished, but never stopped until what? it ran itself down? There was no brake. Nothing but–further accelerators. A whole series of roundbuttons on the floor, which, as he tromped them, surged power into the motor.

Ninety, one hundred, one hundred twenty miles an hour.

"God in heaven!" he screamed. "We're going to hit! How do you like that, girl?"

And in the last instant before collision, he imagined she rather liked it fine.

The cars hit. They erupted in gaseous flame. They burst apart in flinders. They tumbled. He felt himself jerked now this way and that. He was a torch hurtled skyward. His arms and legs danced a crazy rigadoon in midair as he felt his peppermint stick bones snap

in brittle and agonizing ecstasies. Then, clutching death as a dark mate, gesticulating, he fell away in a black surprise, drifting toward further nothings.

He lay dead.

He lay dead a long while.

Then he opened one eye.

He felt the slow burner under his soul. He felt the bubbled water rising to the top of his mind like tea brewing.

"I'm dead," he said, "but alive. Did you see all that, wife? Dead but alive."

He found himself sitting in the vehicle, upright.

He sat there for ten minutes thinking about all that had happened.

"Well now," he mused. "Was that: not interesting? Not to say fascinating? Not to say, almost exhilarating? I mean, sure, it knocked the stuff out of me, scared the soul out one ear and back the other, hit my wind and tore my gut, broke the bones and shook the wits, but, but, but, wife, but, but, but, dear sweet Meg, Meggy, Megan, I wish you were here, it might tamp the tobacco tars out of your half-ass lungs and bray the mossy graveyard back-breaking meanness from your marrow. Let me see here now, wife, let's have a look, Harpwell-my-husband-the-poet."

He tinkered with the dials.

He thrummed the great hound motor.

"Shall we chance another diversion? Try another embattled picnic excursion? Let's."

And he set the car on its way.

Almost immediately, the vehicle was traveling one hundred and then one hundred fifty miles per hour.

Almost immediately, the opposing car appeared ahead.

"Death," said the poet. "Are you always here, then? Do you hang about? Is this your questing place? Let's test your mettle!"

The car raced. The other car hurtled.

He wheeled over into the other lane.

The other car followed, homing toward Destroy.

"Yes, I see, well, then, this," said the poet.

And switched a switch and jumped another throttle.

In the instant before impact, the two cars transformed themselves. Shuttering through illusory veils, they became jet-craft at take-off, shrieking, the two jets banged flame, tore air, yammered back sound-barrier explosions before the mightiest one of all– as the two bullets impacted, fused, interwove, interlaced blood, mind, and eternal blackness, and fell away into a net of strange and peaceful midnight.

I'm dead, he thought again.

And it feels fine, thanks.

He awoke to feel a smile on his face.

He was seated in the vehicle.

Twice dead, he thought, and feeling better each time. Why? Isn't that odd? Curiouser and curiouser. Queer beyond queerness.

He thrummed the motor again.

What this time?

Does it locomote? he wondered. How about a big black choo-choo train out of half-primordial times?

And he was on his way, an engineer. The sky flicked over, and the motion-picture screens or whatever they were pressed in with swift illusions of pouring smoke and steaming whistle and huge wheel within wheel on grinding track, and the track ahead wound through hills, and far on up around a mountain came another train, black as a buffalo herd, pouring belches of smoke, on the same two rails, the same track, heading toward wondrous accident.

"I see," said the poet, "I do begin to see. I begin to know what this and what used for, for such as me, the poor wandering idiots of a world, confused, and sore put upon by mothers as soon as dropped from wombs, insulted with Christian guilt, and gone mad from the need of destruction, and collecting a pittance of hurt here and scar tissue there, and a larger portable wife grievance beyond, but one thing sure, we do want

to die, we do want to be killed, and here's the very thing for it, in convenient quick pay! So pay it out, machine, dole it out, sweet raving device! Rape away, death! I'm your very man!"

And the two locomotives met and climbed each other. Up a black ladder of explosion they wheeled and locked their driveshafts and plastered their slick negro bellies together and rubbed boilers and beautifully banged the night in a single out-flung whirl and flurry of shrapnel and flame. Then the locomotives, in a cumbrous rapine dance, seized and matted together with their violence and passion, gave a monstrous curtsy and fell off the mountain and took a thousand years to go all the way down to the rocky pits.

The poet awoke and immediately grabbed the controls. He was humming under his breath, stunned. He was singing wild tunes. His eyes flashed. His heart beat swiftly.

"More, more, I see it now, I know what to do, more, more, please, oh God, more, for the truth shall set me free, more!"

He hoofed three, four, five pedals.

He snapped six switches.

The vehicle was auto-jet-locomotive-glider-missile-rocket.

He ran, he steamed, he roared, he soared, he flew. Cars veered toward him. Locomotives loomed. Jets rammed. Rockets screamed.

And in one wild three-minute spree he hit two hundred cars, rammed twenty trains, blew up ten gliders, exploded forty missiles, and, far out in Space, gave up his glorious soul in a final Fourth of July Death celebration as an interplanetary rocket going two hundred thousand miles an hour struck an iron meteor and went beautifully to hell.

In all, in a few short minutes he figured he must have been torn apart and put back together a few times less than five hundred.

When it was all over, he sat not touching the wheel, his feet free of the pedals.

After a half hour of sitting there, he began to laugh. He threw his head back and let out great warwhoops. Then he got up, shaking his head, drunker than ever in his life, really drunk now, and he knew he would stay that way forever, and never need drink again.

I'm punished, he thought, really punished at last. Really hurt at last, and hurt enough, over and over, so I will never need hurt again, never need to be destroyed again, never have to collect another insult or take another wound, or ask for a simple grievance.

God bless the genius of man and the inventors of such machines, that enable the guilty to pay and at last be rid of the dark albatross and the awful burden. Thank you, City, thank you, old blueprinter of needful souls. Thank you. And which way out?

A door slid open.

His wife stood waiting for him.

"Well, there you are," she said. "And still drunk."

"No," he said, "Dead."

"Drunk."

"Dead," he said, "beautifully dead at last. Which means, free. I won't need you any more, dead Meg, Meggy-Megeen. You're set free, also, like an awful conscience. Go haunt someone else, girl. Go destroy. I forgive you your sins on me, for I have at last forgiven myself. I am off the Christian hook. I am the dear wandering dead who, dead, can at last live. Go and do likewise, lady. Inside with you. Be punished and set free. So long, Meg. Farewell. Toodleoo."

He wandered away.

"Where do you think you're going?" she cried.

"Why, out into life and the blood of life and happy at last."

"Come back here!" she screamed.

"You can't stop the dead, for they wander the Universe, happy as children in the dark field."

"Harpwell!" she brayed. "Harpwell!"

But he stepped on a river of silver metal.

And let the dear river bear him laughing until the tears glittered on his cheeks, away and away from the shriek and the bray and the scream of that woman, what was her name? no matter, back there, and gone.

And when he reached the gate he walked out and along the canal in the fine day, heading toward the far towns.

By that time, he was singing every old tune he had known as a child of six.

It was a church.

No, not a church.

Wilder let the door swing shut.

He stood in cathedral darkness, waiting.

The roof, if roof there was, breathed up in a great suspense, flowed up beyond reach or sight.

The floor, if floor there was, was a mere firmness beneath. It, too, was black.

And then, the stars came out. It was like that first night of childhood when his father had taken him out beyond the city to a hill where the lights could not diminish the Universe. And there were a thousand, no ten thousand, no ten million billion stars filling the darkness. The stars were manifold and bright, and they did not care. Even then he had known: they do not care. If I breathe or do not breathe, live or die, the eyes that look from all around don't care. And he had seized his father's hand and gripped tight, as if he might fall up into that Abyss.

Now, in this building, he was full of the old terror and the old sense of beauty and the old silent crying out after mankind. The stars filled him with pity for small men lost in so much size.

Then yet another thing happened.

Beneath his feet, space opened wide and let through yet another billion sparks of light.

He was suspended as a fly is held upon a vast telescopic lens. He walked on a water of space. He stood upon a transparent flex of great eye, and all about him, as on a night in winter, beneath foot and above head, in all directions, were nothing but stars.

So, in the end, it was a church, it was a cathedral, a multitude of farflung universal shrines, here a worshipping of Horsehead Nebula, there Orion's galaxy, and there Andromeda, like the head of God, fiercely gazed and thrust through the raw dark stuffs of night to stab his soul and pin it writhing against the backside of his flesh.

God, everywhere, fixed him with shutterless and unblinking eyes.

And he, a bacterial shard of that same Flesh, stared back and winced but the slightest.

He waited. And a planet drifted upon the void. It spun by once with a great mellow autumn face. It circled and came under him.

And he stood upon a far world of green grass and great lush trees, where the air was fresh, and a river ran by like the rivers of childhood, flashing the sun and leaping with fish.

He knew that he had traveled very far to reach this world. Behind him lay the rocket. Behind lay a century of travel, of sleeping, of waiting, and now, here was the reward.

"Mine?" he asked the simple air, the simple grass, the long simplicity of water that spelled by in the shallow sands.

And the world answered wordless: yours.

Yours without the long travel and the boredom, yours without ninety-nine years of flight from Earth, of sleeping in kept tubes, of intravenous feedings, of nightmares dreamt of Earth lost and gone, yours without torture, without pain, yours without trial and error, failure and destruction. Yours without sweat and terror. Yours without a falling down of tears. Yours. Yours.

But Wilder did not put out his hands to accept.

And the sun dimmed in the alien sky.

And the world drifted from under his feet.

And yet another world swam up and passed in a huge parade of even brighter glories.

And this world, too, spun up to take his weight. And here, if anything, the fields were richer green, the mountains capped with melting snows, far fields ripening with strange harvests, and scythes waiting on the edge of fields for him to lift and sweep and cut the grain and live out his life any way that he might.

Yours. The merest touch of weather upon the hairs within his ear said this. Yours.

And Wilder, without shaking his head, moved back. He did not say no. He thought his rejection.

And the grass died in the fields.

The mountains crumbled.

The river shallows ran to dust.

And the world sprang away.

And Wilder stood again in Space where God had stood before creating a world out of Chaos.

And at last he spoke and said to himself:

"It would be easy. Oh Lord, yes, I'd like that. No work, nothing, just accept. But... You can't give me what I want."

He looked at the stars.

"Nothing can be given, ever."

The stars were growing dim.

"It's really very simple. I must borrow, I must earn. I must take."

The stars quivered and died.

"Much obliged and thank you, no."

The stars were all gone.

He turned and, without looking back, walked upon darkness. He hit the door with his palm. He strode out into the City.

He refused to care if the machine Universe behind him cried out in a great chorus, all cries and wounds, like a woman scorned. The crockery in a vast robot kitchen fell. By the time it hit the floor, he was gone.

It was a Museum of Weapons.

The hunter walked among the cases.

He opened a case and hefted a weapon constructed like a spider's antennae.

It hummed, and a flight of metal bees sizzled out the rifle bore, flew away, and stung a target-mannequin some fifty yards away, then fell lifeless, clattering to the floor.

The hunter nodded with admiration, and put the rifle back in the case.

He prowled on, curious as a child, testing yet other weapons here and there which dissolved glass or caused metal to run in bright yellow pools of molten lava.

"Excellent!" "Fine!" "Absolutely great!"

His cry rang out again and again as he slammed cases open and shut, and finally chose the gun.

It was a gun that, without fuss or fury, did away with matter. You pressed the button, there was a brief discharge of blue light, and the target simply vanished. No blood. No bright lava. No trace.

"All right," he announced, leaving the Place of Guns, "we have the weapon. How about the Game, the Grandest Beast ever in the Long Hunt?"

He leapt onto the moving sidewalk.

An hour later he had passed a thousand buildings and scanned a thousand open parks without itching his finger.

He moved uneasily from treadway to treadway, shifting speeds now in this direction, now in that.

Until at last he saw a river of metal that sped underground.

Instinctively, he jumped toward that.

The metal stream carried him down into the secret gut of the City.

Here all was warm blood darkness. Here strange pumps moved the pulse of the City. Here were distilled the sweats that lubricated the roadways and lifted the elevators and swarmed the offices and stares with motion.

The hunter half crouched on the roadway. His eyes squinted. Perspiration gathered in his palms. His trigger finger greased the metal gun, sliding.

"Yes," he whispered. "By God, now. This is it. The City itself...the great Beast. Why didn't I think of that? The Animal City, the terrible prey. It has men for breakfast, lunch and dinner. It kills them with machines. It munches their bones like breadsticks. It spits them out like toothpicks. It lives long after they die. The City, by God, the City. Well now..."

He glided through dark grottoes of television eyes which showed him remote parkways and high towers.

Deeper within the belly of the underground world he sank as the river lowered itself. He passed a school of computers that chattered in maniac chorus. He shuddered as a cloud of paper confetti from one titan machine, holes punched out to perhaps record his passing, fell upon him in a whispered snow.

He raised his gun. He fired.

The machine disappeared.

He fired again. A skeleton strutwork under yet another machine vanished.

The City screamed.

At first very low and then very high, then, rising, falling, like a siren. Lights flashed. Bells began to ricochet alarums. The metal river shuddered under his feet, slowed. He fired at television screens which glared all white upon him. They blinked out and did not exist.

The City screamed higher until he raved against it, himself, and the marrow in his bones shook out an insanity of black dust.

He did not see, until it was too late, that the road on which he sped fell into the gnashing maw of a machine that was used for some purpose long forgotten centuries before.

He thought that by pressing the trigger he would make the terrible mouth disappear. It did indeed vanish. But as the roadway sped on and he whirled and fell as it picked up speed, he realized at last that his weapon did not truly destroy, it merely made invisible what was there and what still remained though unseen.

He gave a terrible cry to match the cry of the City. He flung out the gun in a last blow. The gun went into cogs and wheels and teeth and was twisted down.

The last thing he saw was a deep elevator shaft that fell away for perhaps a mile into the earth.

He knew that it might take him two minutes to hit the bottom. He shrieked.

The worst thing was, he would be conscious...all the way down...

The rivers shook. The silver rivers trembled. The pathways, shocked, convulsed the metal shores through which they sped.

Wilder, traveling, was almost knocked flat by the concussion.

What had caused the concussion, he could not see. Perhaps, far off, there was a cry, a murmur of dreadful sound, which swiftly faded.

Wilder moved on. The silver track threaded on. But the City seemed poised, agape. The City seemed tensed. Its huge and various muscles were cramped, alert.

Feeling this, Wilder began to walk as well as be moved by the swift path.

"Thank God. There's the Gate. The sooner I'm out of this place the happier I'll—"

The Gate was indeed there, not a hundred yards away. But, on the instant, as if hearing his declaration, the river stopped. It shivered. Then it started to move back, taking him where he did not wish to go.

Incredulous, Wilder spun about and, in spinning, fell. He clutched at the stuffs of the rushing sidewalk.

His face, pressed to the vibrant grillework of the river-rushing pavement, heard the machineries mesh and mill beneath, humming and agroan, forever sluicing, forever feverish for journeys and mindless excursions. Beneath the calm metal, embattlements of hornets stung and buzzed, lost bees burbled and subsided. Collapsed, he saw the Gate lost away behind. Burdened, he remembered at last the extra weight upon his back, the jet-power equipment which might give him wings.

He jammed his hand to the switch on his belt. And in the instant before the sidewalk might have pulsed him off among sheds and museum walls, he was airborne.

Flying, he hovered, then swam the air back to hang above a casual Parkhill gazing up, all covered with grease and smiling from a dirty face. Beyond Parkhill, at the Gate, stood the frightened maid. Beyond even further, near the yacht at the landing, stood Aaronson, back turned to the City, nervous to be moving on.

"Where are the others?" cried Wilder.

"Oh, they won't be back," said Parkhill, easily. "It figures, doesn't it? I mean, it's quite a place."

"Place!" said Wilder, hovered now up, now down, turning slowly, apprehensive. "We've got to get them out! It's not safe."

"It's safe if you like it. I like it," said Parkhill.

And all the while there was a gathering of earthquake in the ground and in the air, which Parkhill chose to ignore.

"You're leaving, of course," he said, as if nothing were wrong. "I knew you would. Why?"

"Why?" Wilder wheeled like a dragonfly before a trembling of storm wind. Buffeted up, buffeted down, he flung his words at Parkhill, who didn't bother to duck but smiled up and accepted. "Good God, Sam, the place is Hell. The Martians had enough sense to get out. They saw they had overbuilt themselves. The damn City does everything, which is too much! Sam!"

But at that instant, they both looked round and up. For the sky was shelling over. Great lids were vising in the ceiling. Like an immense flower, the tops of buildings were petalling out to cover themselves. Windows were shutting down. Doors were slamming. A sound of fired cannons echoed through the streets.

The Gate was thundering shut.

The twin jaws of the Gate, shuddering, were in motion.

Wilder cried out, spun round, and dived.

He heard the maid below him. He saw her reach up. Then, swooping, he gathered her in. He kicked the air. The jet lifted them both.

Like a bullet to a target he rammed for the Gate. But an instant before, burdened, he reached it, the Gates banged together. He was barely able to veer course and soar upward along the raw metal as the entire City shook with the roar of the steel.

Parkhill shouted below. And Wilder was flying up, up along the wall, looking this way and that.

Everywhere, the sky was closing in. The petals were coming down, coming down. There was only a last small patch of stone sky to his right. He blasted for that. And kicking, made it through, flying, as the final flange of steel clipped into place, and the City was closed to itself.

He hung for a moment, suspended, and then flew down along the outer wall to the dock where Aaronson stood by the yacht staring at the huge shut Gates.

"Parkhill," whispered Wilder, looking at the City, the walls, the Gates. "You fool. You damned fool."

"Fools, all of them," said Aaronson, and turned away. "Fools. Fools."

They waited a moment longer and listened to the City, humming, alive, kept to itself, its great mouth filled with a few bits of warmth, a few lost people somewhere hid away in there. The Gates would stay shut now, forever. The City had what it needed to go on a long while.

Wilder looked back at the place, as the yacht took them back out of the mountain and away up the canal.

They passed the poet a mile further on, walking along the rim of the canal. He waved them on. "No. No, thanks. I feel like walking. It's a fine day. Goodbye. Go on."

The towns lay ahead. Small towns. Small enough to be run by men instead of running them. He heard the brass music. He saw the neon lights at dusk. He made out the junkyards in the fresh night under the stars.

Beyond the towns stood the silver rockets, tall, waiting to be fired off and away toward the wilderness of stars.

"Real," whispered the rockets, "real stuff. Real travel. Real time. Real space. No gifts. Nothing free. Just a lot of good hard work."

The yacht touched into its home dock.

"Rockets, by God," he murmured. "Wait till I get my hands on you."

He ran away in the night, to do just that.

FADE IN:

A date.

A title.

AUGUST 10th, 2020 A.D.

"NIGHT MEETING"

FADE OUT.

IN MONTAGE we see soda fountain signs flash on, a soda-jerk stirring a soda, hot dog neons lighting up, hot dogs frying, miscellaneous shots of cleaners, sweepers, small jobbers everywhere on Mars, ending with a gas station light flashing on, as the CAMERA begins to pull back and find a station far out in the Martian wilds.

THE STORY TELLER
And the years passed and amidst all the great men with the huge ideas who built the great cities and made the giant computers hear and obey...were the plain men with plain, simple, and familiar jobs...

A hovercraft hushes into the gas station, coming in off an ancient highway.

At the controls, TOMAS GOMEZ, a Mexican-American of some 27 years, lets the hovercraft sink to rest as he glances over to see:

Four gas-pumps in a row. One of the pumps, however, is an old man standing silent in that row, deep in his thoughts.

TOMAS
Hey, Pops.

OLD MAN blinks, then sees GOMEZ and his machine.

THE OLD MAN
Oh...sorry.

TOMAS
Fill 'er up!

THE OLD MAN moves to affix the pump to the side of the machine, as the wind blows dust down the road.

TOMAS
Kind of alone out here, aren't you, Pop?

THE OLD MAN
Not bad.. Always something new. I made up my mind when I came here. Last year I'd forget Earth. Just look at Mars and how different it is. Hell, I like just watching the weather. It's Martian. I get a big kick out of the different flowers and different rain. An old man needs to have things different. Young people don't want to talk to him, other old people bore hell out of

him. So I thought the best place to retire is a place so different that all you got to do is open your eyes and you're entertained.

He has worked his way clear around the circular vehicle now, praying, polishing, talking quietly.

TOMAS
You got the right idea, Pop.
(checks his watch)
I'm on my way to a party–

Ignoring this, THE OLD MAN works, talks, watchful of the night hills just beyond.

THE OLD MAN
I'm not surprised by anything any more. Everything's crazy up here. The soil, the air, the canals, the natives (I never saw any yet, but I hear they're around), even my clock acts crazy. Even time is way-off up here. Ever think what Time really is? Can you touch it, smell it? What color is Time? Can you hear it, falling all around? I mean, is it like winter and snow, and you caught in the blizzard? Time. Yes-sir. Sometimes I feel I'm here all by myself, no one else on the whole damn planet. Sometime I feel just eight years old, my body squeezed up and everything else tall. Lord, Mars is just the place for an old fool! Christmas presents every day. Why, why you know that highway right there, built by the Martians, is over forty centuries old and still in good shape? That's one dollar, fifty cents, thanks, good night.

During all the above, the OLD MAN circling, Tomas has been alternately intrigued and bothered by the sound of the words and the feel of the night. Drawn into the talk, enchanted at the center of the moving action of the OLD MAN, TOMAS is now shocked by the abruptness of its being over.

The OLD MAN's hand is held out, but his face looks only at the night. TOMAS puts money in the hand that does not weigh or feel it.

TOMAS
Good night.

The hovercraft lifts up, blowing, on its own quiet cyclone, and moves away.

TOMAS looks back. At the OLD MAN once more a pumplike figure motionless among his various pumps, all of them standing in a line in the circle of light.

His craft skims over the ancient highway, dust flying behind its passage.

On impulse, TOMAS veers his ship hissing off on a detour which is covered with rock and sand. And as the craft passes over the ancient dust, it sucks up and away the rocks and dirt so that old mosaics are briefly revealed.

From above, his craft sighing upon the old highway is like an eraser, coming upon blind soil, passing over it, and revealing beauty, emerald and gold colors of creatures worked into the road.

TOMAS opens a compartment and takes out a sandwich, which he eats. Enjoying himself, he breathes deep between bites, and reaches up to feel the rivering air, to watch it move his fingers in the slipstream, half-exultant.

A gossamer drift of white, almost a ghost-presence seen and gone among the far dunes of the dead sea.

TOMAS suddenly gasps. For pacing him on the right is a Martian sandship which, by its very silence, has crept up to move along in tandem with his hovercraft.

Swiftly, with a great bloom of sail, the ship slides ahead.

TOMAS tries to catch up, putting on speed.

But the ship vanishes in a swirl of dust far away.
TOMAS narrows his eyes.

The sandship is returning! Rushing, it flies along in a great batwing sound, a great flutter of colored silken canvasses, a shrieking of main-sail and beam. At the prow of the sandship, a Martian stands.

TOMAS looks up at great lovely, boomed thunders of sail, inches away, and at a masked man, the mask all bronze with eye-slots, there.

And the ship runs on.

TOMAS hits the controls. The hovercraft circles. Slowly the two crafts approach each other.

And at last the two crafts stop in the middle of the night, the old dry sea, in emptiness, alone.

TOMAS looks up at: The sighing sails collapsed upon their rigging, in the moonlight. And down at: The mask which is still at the rail in the front of the ship. Gold eyes peer from the bronze slots.

Slowly, TOMAS raises one hand. Slowly, the man in the sandship does the same.

Slowly, TOMAS gets out of his hovercraft. And sees that the ship's deck is now empty.

TOMAS walks to the sandship and looks up.

At the huge sails hung like beautiful birds on the masts.

A golden rope ladder suddenly unspirals down to end at his feet.

He hesitates, starts climbing the rope ladder, straddles the rail and stops.

THE MARTIAN is about ten feet away, watching him. TOMAS nods. The mask shoves imperceptibly.

BOTH TOGETHER
I'm Tomas Gomez.
I'm Muhe Ca.

QUICK CUT TO BOTH CLOSEUP. They cease. Each waits for the other to speak. Confused TOMAS tries again.

TOMAS
Tomas Gomez.

THE MARTIAN
Muhe Ca.
You speak my language.

TOMAS
No, you speak mine!

THE MARTIAN
Perhaps, with the mind, and the speaking of the mind,
there is only one language.

TOMAS
Perhaps.

There is an embarrassed silence. The mask moves to look at the sandwich which TOMAS still clutches in his hand.

THE MARTIAN
A different thing?

TOMAS
I doubt if you know it. Our food.

THE MARTIAN
Food...?

TOMAS
I was just going to...Split it with me?

On impulse he holds it out.

THE MASK scans him. The Gold eyes see:

The good face of TOMAS GOMEZ, as he holds out his hand.

The MARTIAN waits, then moves his own hand.

Their hands reach into the Frame from either side. The MARTIAN's fingers melt through the sandwich.

TOMAS drops the sandwich.

GOMEZ
I'll be damned.

THE MARTIAN
Name of the gods.

BOTH TOGETHER
Did you see what happened?!

Both stand cold and incredulous and look down at: The sandwich on the deck of the ship.

Both look around at the empty sea which is enchanted with Time and old years and the wandering of the dusty wind.

TOMAS GOMEZ shivers.

THE MARTIAN stoops to touch at the sandwich. His finger moves through the ghost texture of the bread.

THE MARTIAN
Something is happening...

TOMAS
You can say that again.

THE MARTIAN broods over the fallen bread, then thinking takes from his waist a brooch which holds the material in place. He tosses it.

The brooch falls through TOMAS' fingers, as if they did not exist.

The brooch sparkles with moonlight on the deck. TOMAS edges his toe, his boot, touching at the gem. The boot passes through.

TOMAS lifts his gaze and for the first time sees: Faint constellations of stars seen through the Martian's flesh.

TOMAS
The stars!

THE MARTIAN in turn sees constellations of light pierce TOMAS GOMEZ' face, arms, and chest.

THE MARTIAN
Yes...the stars.

TOMAS
I can see through you.

THE MARTIAN
And I through you.

He feels his arms, his chest, as TOMAS touches his own face

THE MARTIAN
I have flesh. I am alive.

THOMAS
I'm real. Then, you must be dead.

THE MARTIAN
No, you!

TOMAS
A ghost!

THE MARTIAN
A spirit!

The pennants flap on the ship masts above.

The hovercraft, beyond, makes a cracking sound, its motor cooling.

TOMAS
Something is going on. Because...Well, you're not afraid of me.

THE MARTIAN
Should I be?

TOMAS
Don't you remember? We come down out of space with our rockets twenty years ago? The disease. It killed most of you. You're rare. Don't you know that?

THE MARTIAN
No. We live. I'm on my way to a festival now at the Main Canal, near the mountains. There, do you see the City?

THE MARTIAN looks off, pointing. We see the city as he sees it, glowing with lights, very beautiful and far away.

TOMAS looks, and we see the city as he sees it, tumbled into dust.

TOMAS
Why, that city's been dead a thousand years. See the broken pillars?

THE MARTIAN
The pillars stand tall.

TOMAS
There's dust in the streets.

THE MARTIAN
No, the streets are clean. And filled with carnival lights. There are beautiful boats on the far canals with beautiful women in the boats holding fire-flowers in their hands.

TOMAS
You say that canal is filled with–water?

THE MARTIAN
But, yes! There!

We see the canal by the edge of the sea and it runs with colored water in the moonlight, branching into other canals.

TOMAS looks. And the same canal blows only with a tide of light moon-colored sand and dustdevils.

TOMAS
I'm cold.

He remembers something.

TOMAS
I'm going to a party, too. In the new mining town, there, near those rocket ships.

We see what TOMAS sees, the far mining community, the tall lengths of silver rockets.

THE MARTIAN looks, and the mining-town, the rockets, are gone.

THE MARTIAN
Now, I, too, feel cold. Tonight, there is a thing to the light, the hills, the sky. I read your mind: "The time is out of joint"? But...you must be someone from the Past.

TOMAS
No, your future.

THE MARTIAN
How can you prove who is from Yesterday, and who from Tomorrow? Where is the clock to tell us?

TOMAS

Those ruins, your city, proves it. I am the Future. You are dead.

THE MARTIAN

My heart beats, my stomach hungers, my mouth thirsts. No, no, not dead, not alive, either of us. Caught between. Two strangers passing by night.

TOMAS looks off at the shifting shadows and light.

TOMAS (nods)

Are you afraid?

THE MARTIAN

Who wants to see the Future, who ever does? A man can face the Past, but to think, the pillars crumbled, you say? And the canals empty and dry, the maidens dead, the flowers withered? But there they are. They wait for me.

TOMAS

And my friends wait for me.

THE MARTIAN

Well, then, what does it matter which is Past or Future, if we are both alive? For what follows will follow, tomorrow or in ten thousand years. How do you know that those temples are not the temples of your own civilization one hundred centuries from this hour tumbled and broken? Perhaps you are my ancestor. We may share the same blood. But...the night is short...a toast...

From nearby THE MARTIAN takes forth a silver urn and cup and pours. TOMAS takes his small thermos-flask from his belt and pours.

TOMAS

It's only coffee...but...To your city, your festival, I wish I were going with you.

THE MARTIAN

To your new town, and the strange ships you speak of...I would like to see that.

They drink silently, their eyes on each other, and then beyond.

To the waiting MARTIAN town of lights and festival.

To the new earth mining-town by the rockets.

TOMAS (quietly)
See you.

THE MARTIAN
There is always the possibility.

And TOMAS is gone down the ladder.

The sails billow out in great flutters.

The hovercraft leaps up upon its invisible legs of forced air. THE MARTIAN looks down at the drifting hovercraft as they pace each other for a moment.

And then with a great wheeling, veering flourish of sail over the double moons, the sandship whispers off away, around, and back in the opposite direction.

TOMAS (whispering)
Good Lord...what a dream <u>that</u> was.

THE MARTIAN takes a last glance at the hovercraft which, also a ghost, it seems, moves distantly.

THE MARTIAN (quietly)
How <u>strange</u> a vision was that...

The hovercraft moves off toward the far town and rockets.

The sandship moves off toward the festival, the water canal, the boats, the music.

We watch each of them vanish until we are left alone with the track of the sandship cut in the sand, and the wider suction-track of the hovercraft left in the sand, and as the CAMERA lifts to look at these, the sea is now empty, both are gone, and the wind blows.

FADE TO DARKNESS.

FADE IN:

A date.

A title.

MAY 7th, 2028 A.D.

"THE TIME OF GOING AWAY"

DISSOLVE TO:

FADE IN: Twilight.

Near the dead sea highway, under the first stars, a truck appears.

In the truck which is loaded with flowers, with fruit, DRISCOLL moves happily toward town.

He looks up, whistling. The green star of Earth lies low on the horizon. He nods to it.

DRISCOLL
Hello, Earth! Driscoll here! What's new?

He touches his portable radio slung on the windscreen. Silence. He shakes it. He shrugs.

DRISCOLL
Some day soon, got to buy new batteries!

And the truck moves off, a great moving garden of flowers.

And the truck motors into the silent town.

And slows because DRISCOLL hears and sees:

A radio playing loud and alone on one side, a radio playing on the other.

One person standing out in the open air looking up. And another, and more people, and more radios. As the truck moves, slowing. And DRISCOLL, curious, somewhat uneasy, looks out. And there are more people everywhere, just coming out, looking up, or out already, looking up at the sky. DRISCOLL stops the truck. The flowers nod around him as he hears the far radio voices.

One voice, among many, comes clear:

RADIO VOICE
Mars Radio Seven...bulletin from Earth Radio Interplanetary. Undeclared War. Australian Continent hit by Hydrogen Explosion. Rumor Los Angeles bombed. Extent of Conflict so far uncalculated...

DRISCOLL moves on, walking now, out of his truck, and wandering, listening. The street is full of people. Everywhere are radio voices from portable sets or issuing from open doors and windows, in many languages, on various channels beamed from Earth. Everywhere, men, women, children, listening, gaze at the sky. Their mouths move silently, touching at remembered names of places and peoples.

THE STORY TELLER
In the silent night, everyone came out to look at the star of Earth, so far away it could not be believed. Yet suddenly this night, Earth was reinhabited, memory wakened. A million names were spoken: What was so-and-so doing tonight in Salt Lake? What about this one in Nebraska and that one in Hawaii? Voices came through from Radio Istanbul, Johannesburg, and Rio. But no matter what language or what said, it translated out to one action...

Toward the last of this narration, men move out of houses, people begin to move in the streets.

On the edge of town, people head toward the rocket gantries. We see them walking in night shadows across the tarmac. They are joined by more and more crowds, looking up at:

The rockets limned against the Martian sky. A mechanic who, working at the base of a rocket, hears their approach and looks up.

THE MECHANIC
Hey...where's everyone going?

The CAMERA pans over the crowd who seem unable to put it in words. The CAMERA stops at one man.

THE MAN
Why...home...I think.

CUT SWIFTLY TO: One rocket taking off. And another and another rocket, in great fires, blasting away.

THE STORY TELLER
From the topmost ridge of Everest, men furled their flags and went away. Cortes backed off from the Mexican Coast. Columbus sailed back to Spain.

We see men, women, children moved quietly up the rocket escalators in the blowing wind, looking back at: The quiet towns where the lights are going out.

In montage we watch the town doors and windows shut and locked, shades drawn, lights going out, the streets empty.

THE STORY TELLER
It was the Time of Going Back. But, more important, it was the Time of Going Away...far away and beyond... not to the old home on Earth, but a new home looked for and to be found in the stars.

More rockets fire off, leaving two on the rocket field.

People are moving up the escalators into these rockets, stepping on as their names are called, and moving high in the soft wind, already moving away from life on Mars. It is late afternoon. The sun has almost set.

THE CHECKER
Williams...Fox...Wilson...Clements...Smith. Reverend Wiswell...Father Peregrine...

They move upward, the Reverend and the Father, in this still moment of dusk. Looking ahead, Reverend Wiswell softly exclaims.

WISWELL
Isn't machinery wonderful? Why look, we're making the sun rise again!

And, yes, the escalator is lifting them into the final zone of light, the yellow-pink glow of the last rays beyond the hills. They look off into the warm bath of light.

The sun goes down again.

At the top of the escalator, the dusk settles on their faces.
Inside, all is bustle. They move with other people who are being efficiently led into great cabins filled with crystal cases in which already people are sleeping. The man and woman just ahead embrace, and step into their cases which lid down, showing us the name SMITH, their blood count, blood pressure, blood type, etc.

A faint vapor appears in the cases. The merest rime collects on their faces. Their eyes shut and they are still. Their heartbeats fade to almost nothing. Machinery moves the cases up.

As the cases pass, they read the names.

PEREGRINE
Kressing. Yes, the bio-chemist.

WISWELL
Horten. Nuclear physicist. A fair-to-middling Baptist.

They smile at each other, gently, nodding.

PEREGRINE
Tomas Gomez!

And yes there passes the case and in it TOMAS GOMEZ, who one night met a Martian in a sandship on a dead sea of sand. He sleeps. He dreams.

PEREGRINE
He was a good man.

WILDER
He is a good man. Just asleep.

WILDER has appeared between them, watching GOMEZ drift up to join two hundred others lodged in all the secret cells of the rocket. PEREGRINE muses.

PEREGRINE
For a hundred years of travel? Just what are the chances we'll live through this?

WILDER
One in a thousand. Like life on Earth, only more so. We'll have to do a lot of dying just to exist. We're carrying 400 men, women, and children here who will be good, bad, foolish, and clever along the way. No better and no worse than any other people ever were, but there's a chance a hundred years from today they'll wake and step out on a new world and live forever.

The cases drift up and up. Their names and faces pass. Two final cases come into position with the names PEREGRINE and WISWELL on them. WILDER points to these, quietly.

WILDER
Reverend? Father?

PEREGRINE (hesitates)
Might we...put off going to sleep a few days? We would like...a last look at Earth.

WILDER
There's room in the other ship. We'll transfer you back here in 48 hours. We–

RADIO VOICE (cuts in)
Star-ships One and Two ready. Countdown at 18 hours.

WILDER
Check!

In MONTAGE: we watch WILDER and PEREGRINE and WISWELL move down one gantry escalator, up another, into the other rocket. Then the final preparations, as men hurry to their tasks, as they are strapped in their launching chairs, and WILDER checks computers and pulls switches in the check-off period.

The CAMERA moves over the sleeping people suspended in silence. A siren sounds. A bell rings.

The two rockets stand on the empty field in an almost empty world. The tarmac blows with old papers and dust.

WILDER, perspiring, watches the countdown dial.

The clock hands sweep. A faint voice cries, five, four, three, two, one.

WILDER hits a lever.

The rocket blasts off on a great niagara of fire,

The rocket goes away into space.

A moment later STARSHIP II fires off, lifts, climbs, vanishes.

And we watch the tarmac, the towns go away below in a great flush of fire.

We see the two rockets climb in the windows of the abandoned soda shops, machine shops, luggage shops. The fresh ghost town reflects in its suddenly bright windows the climb and thrust and vanishing of the last rockets away.

Out in the hills, the rocket fire is seen in the windows of an abandoned quonset hut.

And in the slow waters of the canal, the rocket stars moves.

And in the dead Martian towns ten thousand years gone to dust, the pillars tremble, a few rocks fall. An ancient pool with a thin skin of water on it, shows the last glimmer of the rockets which, silent now, vanish.

CUT TO: a deserted Martian frontier town. The streets are empty. After a moment, faintly, a phone rings, three times. Silence. Then another phone, in another direction, rings. The CAMERA swings to examine a distant store where that phone might be. Silence.

CUT TO: a phone booth outside a drug store. The bell rings. After a long moment, a young man with a shrewd look in his eyes, sucking on a soda, comes to the door and looks out at that phone.

CLOSEUP: He is suspicious of a phone that rings in an empty world. He turns and goes back in to bang the cash register. Coins jump out. He grabs a handful, snorts, puts them back in, shuts the register. The phone is still ringing. He squirts more soda in his glass. The phone rings. He sighs.

CLOSEUP: a hand comes in to take the phone off the hook. The CAMERA backs off to see the YOUNG MAN, listening, not speaking. A woman's voice brays out of the phone.

THE WOMAN
Oh, hello! At last! Who's there? (Pause) You must be a man. I can tell by your breathing. I think I'm the last woman left on Mars. I just decided to stay behind.

He says nothing. He sucks thoughtfully on the soda straw, eyes distant, listening, the receiver far out from his ear.

THE WOMEN
You still there? Whyn't you say something?

He listens. There is a rustle, far away. His face quickens. He squints, careful.

THE MAN
What's that sound, that noise?

CUT TO THE WOMAN, CLOSEUP, a plump woman in her forties. As the CAMERA pulls back she is holding a white wedding outfit against her bosom. She smells disaster.

THE WOMAN
Oh, nothing, nothing but a–dress!

THE MAN
What's your name?

THE WOMAN (smiling wildly)
Margo Mae Salk!

THE MAN
Well, Margo Mae...

CUT TO CLOSEUP OF THE MAN.

THE MAN
Well, Margo Mae...

THE WOMAN (on the phone; eagerly)
Yes?

THE MAN
Goodbye.

He leaves the phone off the hook and steps out the door to leap into his small truck and drive away.

As he goes away, the voice brays on the phone, fading.
Rounding a corner, he hears a phone ring here, ring there, in a booth, in a bank, as he roars his engine and charges out of town, leaving the empty streets and the ringing phones. CUT TO:

It is the time just before dawn; faint lights in the sky. After a quick series of shots through the empty town, the CAMERA moves in on one house, which is like many houses built on Mars in the last year. It stands abandoned like the rest, somewhat beyond town, a single dwelling alone in the semi-wilderness by the edge of a canal and near the rim of a dry seashore.

The CAMERA comes to rest like a person stepping on the front step. It has been following a wind-blown tumbleweed which now brambles against the front door mat and the door itself.

A bell rings softly. A TV scanner above the door glows.

TAPE VOICE
Good morning. Identity, please.

The tumbleweed taps against the door, bristling.

TAPE VOICE
Mr. and Mrs. Featherstone are not at home. Step in and wait, please.

The door slides open. The tumbleweed, sucked forward, blows into the hall. The CAMERA swiftly follows.

The tumbleweed slows to a stop as the door shuts. The CAMERA slowly peers around at the early-morning house. There are murmurs and whirs and clicks of the arousing machineries. The light is coming up in the windows as the dawn blooms over Mars.

We view, briefly, a transparent wall in the hallway, which contains within it vast streams, creeks, and tributaries of electric wire, moving tape, canisters of film, spools of wire, scanning equipments, computing analysers, small transistor lights, and other devices, all dimly illumined and mostly silent. A relay clicks as we watch and one spool unwinds under a scanner.

Immediately, through the house, the little night lights go out in room after room in quick MONTAGE.

Another tape snakes under a scanner-light.

2nd TAPE VOICE (softly)
Tick-tock, seven o'clock, time to get up, time to get up, seven o'clock.

The house is silent. The tumbleweed lies quietly in the hall.

The tapes slide and hiss.

3rd TAPE VOICE
Seven-nine, breakfast time, seven-nine.

In the kitchen the breakfast stove hisses and ejects from its warm interior eight pieces of perfectly browned toast, eight eggs sunny side up, sixteen slices of bacon, two coffees and two cool glasses of milk.

From the kitchen ceiling above the table onto which all of this has slid, a 4th voice intones:

4th TAPED VOICE
Today is March 4th, 2011. Today is Mr. Featherstone's birthday. Plus the Anniversary of Tilita's marriage. Insurance is payable, as are water, gas, and light bills.

Rain taps the windows softly.

The weather box, transparent; near the front door, drinks the rain. From it a voice speaks softly.

THE WEATHER BOX
Rain, rain, here to stay. Rubbers, raincoats for today...

A door slides up in the wall. Moving hangers furl down, holding out at arm's length a series of transparent raincoats. Rubbers fall out in a small chute. Umbrellas drop into a brass holder nearby.

4th TAPED VOICE
Eight-one, eight-one, run, run. Off to school, off to work. Run, run, eight-one.

Outside, the hovercraft door lifts on the garage to show the craft within.

The rain falls on the house.

The lights gleam, the tapes slither in the glass wall. CLICK!

The eggs, shriveled, the toast dry, the bacon stale, waiting on the kitchen table, are swept away by an aluminum wedge, scrapped into the sink which closes up like a convulsive metal throat, digesting dishes and all, with a lion-roaring thunder.

Tape runs under the light.

A VOICE
Nine-fifteen, time to clean.

Out of warrens in the wall, tiny robot mice dart.

The rooms, the halls are scrawl with small cleaning animals, all rubber and metal. The mice thud against chairs, whirling their mustached runners. They knead the rug-nap and suck gently at hidden dust. Then they happen upon the brambly tumbleweed in the hall and for a moment touch and back off from it as if it were a spider.

The tumbleweed, in turn, is given a sort of strange half-animate life by their life by their touching round about, circling it. It tumbles this way and that, finally being herded toward a flap-door in the wall. The mice scurry after, squeaking their robot electronic squeaks.

The tumbleweed hits the aluminum door-flap which opens. The tumbleweed pops in. A moment later fire and smoke caught up. The flap drops. Finis.

The mice rush through the house. A chime rings. They scurry-vanish back into their warrens. Click. The house is clean!

The rain ceases outside.

A green tape slides in the crystal wall. Lights glow.

TAPE VOICE
Ten-fifteen, garden green.

Fountain sprinklers go on all over the garden surrounding the house!

The stove begins frying pancakes and pork sausages.

TAPE VOICE
Twelve-nine, lunch time, lunch time, twelve-nine.

The front bell rings. The front door flies open! The TV scanners blink, the lights flicker.

A dog stands abandoned and alone, obviously frightened and hungry, on the porch.

TAPE VOICE
Your name, please?

The dog shivering, eyes the house, and the empty halls.

In the kitchen the sausages fry.

The dog sniffs, hungrily, and edges in, whining.

TAPE VOICE
Your name, please?

The dog backs off.

The food fries in the kitchen.

The dog drawn back to the door, edges in. His pelt is dirty and covered with leaf-flakes.

The sausages are dished onto plates.

The dog is inside now. Dirt falls from his pelt.

The mechanical mice dart squealing from the walls!

The dog, yelps, snapping, terrified, whirls and flees! He leaps out the front door just before it SLAMS shut!

The mice quietly snatch up the leaf-flakes and snap back the walls.

Outside in the half-patio, a lid slides up.

TAPE VOICE
Two-thirty-three, bridge and tea, quiet song, mah-jong, bridge, tea, two-thirty-three.

Tables unfold out like immense green-baize butterflies. Cards clatter out in a shower of pipe. Mah-jong pieces tumble in a dry pile. A tea-tray glides from the kitchen wall into the patio, frosted glasses of tea on it, as music plays.

Clocks spin their hands.

TAPE VOICE
Four, four. No more. No more. Four, four.

The cards and chips are swept into bins. The butterfly tables fly back in the walls.

TAPE VOICE
Four-ten, children's den, late this day, children play...

And the walls of the almost empty children's room glow. Each wall in turn snaps on like a great square eye given electric life.

We see pillows in the center of the room, cushions and small chairs, empty, facing these walls as the show begins.

Animals take shape; yellow giraffes, blue lions, pink antelopes, lilac panthers which cavort in the deep crystal depths of the TV walls. On all sides, strange animals pad out of jungles to look at:

The empty room, the empty children's cushions and chairs.

TAPE VOICE
Six-nine, dinner time.

Food manifests on the dining room table.

TAPE VOICE
Eight-nine, bathing time.

Water gushes in foaming bathtubs.

A fire springs to life on the open hearth. In a metal stand opposite the hearth a cigar pops out, half an inch of soft gray ash on it, smoking, waiting. There is a hissing sound in this library room. A soft woman's voice asks:

WOMAN'S VOICE
Mr. McClellan, Mr. McClellan, which poem would you like this evening?

The house is silent. The chairs face each other's emptiness.

WOMAN'S VOICE
Since you express no preference, I shall select a poem at random. (Pause) Sara. Teasdale.

Soft music plays as the CAMERA circles and moves through the house.

WOMAN'S VOICE
There will come soft rains and the smell of the ground,
And swallows circling with their shimmering sound.
And frogs in the pools singing at night,
And wild plum trees in tremulous white.
Robins will wear their feathery fire,
Whistling their whims on a low fence wire.

Lights dim in all the rooms as the house settles toward the time of sleep. Outside, the garage door shuts on the hovercraft. Inside, the kitchen door clicks itself off. The circuits glow to warm the beds, as the voice continues.

WOMAN'S VOICE
And not one will know of the war, not one,
Will care at last when it is done.

The nursery is returning its zoo, the lights are dimming slowly. The animals are retreating to their jungles.

WOMAN'S VOICE
Not one would mind, neither bird nor tree,
If mankind perished utterly.

The butterflies vanish deep in the forest of the TV wall.

WOMAN'S VOICE
And Spring herself, when she woke at dawn
Would scarcely know that we were gone.

The fire burns on the quiet hearth surrounded by silent empty chairs.

There is a moment of silence through the whole house. During all of the previous moments of the reading of the poem, the wind has begun to rise outside. The rain has long since stopped. But now, the fire roars on the hearth, sucked by the wind in the chimney. At every window, bushes or tree branches tap.

Outside, a tree leans in the harsh wind. A branch cracks.

The kitchen window explodes with the impact of the heavy branch falling through. A number of bottles which have been lined up on the window sill are scattered, breaking. One lands on the stove and shatters instantly into a running, rivering, streaming blaze which drips off the stove, scatters on the floor. The kitchen drapes go up in flames. The tree branch catches fire. The creek of flame runs through the kitchen to the hall carpet which sets itself ablaze.

A wind gusts through the house.

The resulting suction pulls at the fireplace so the screen topples and a great swarm of firefly-sparks leap out in a brilliant excursion through the library.

Sparks litter everything, burn everywhere.

TAPE VOICE
Fire! Fire! Fire!

But the curtains and furniture are ablaze now in the library. The heat shatters the library windows and let in furies of wind which suck forth more bonfires from the roaring fireplace.

The crystal wall flashes in panics of rotation, clicking, humming.
All over the house, doors slam!

Mice leap out of walls, racing to snatch leaflets of spark and burnt ash.

A wave of heat hits the crystal wall. It splinters. Some of it cracks and shatters. We see some spools and mechanisms wounded and crippled so we know the directions being sent by electric impulse through the house are now "sick," "insane."

Electric doors open and shut, open and shut, idiotically, gusting drapes through the house as: the front door opens, slams, causing vast tongues of heat to flourish through the halls.

As vents in the parlor ceiling pop wide. Brass nozzles spout out to fountain water upon the blaze there.

In other rooms, similar nozzles jump out of walls in full pumping action. As the mice scurry the floors, squeaking hysterically. New mice join them; fatter mice with water pistol mouths which run forth to pistol water and run back.

The front door leaps wide and freezes so a windfall torrent of spark and heat trough and furrow the airs of the house, while the Greek chorus of voices cries, again:

THE TAPE VOICES
Fire...fire...fire...!

The crystal wall shatters yet more and a tape runs dead. A fire-red Emergency tape jumps off its reel.

The spout-nozzles in the ceilings, their nervous system dead because of the destroyed tape, cease spouting water. All over the house we see the fountains die.

Now the fire is everywhere, as doors fly wide and jam, and the fire runs in to feed upon oil paintings, to lie in beds devouring silks and linens.

Outside, the fire, all the way up the tree, lights the roof, crackles over the shingles or upon the tarred surface whipped by the sandy wind.

The fire feels and handles the clothes in closets.

It fingers and smudges and crisps more pictures.

It hangs itself like new material among the drapes.

It carpets the floors, destroying the mice as they run out in anthill rushings.

In the kitchen, the stove makes breakfasts at a psychopathic rate, ten dozen eggs, six loaves of toast, twenty dozen bacon strips which now, as the fire climbs, are eaten by flame.

Now everywhere in the rooms, walls, eaten, fold back their skins to reveal the arteries and nerves, multi-colored, of the system of electronics which runs the entire fantastic menagerie!

Mirrors snap like brittle ice.

A new section of crystal wall breaks, so that voices blend, dissolve in each other, music bleats, skips, hiccoughs, interlarded with poetry and cries for assistance.

THE MANY VOICES
Fire, fire, run, run, fire, fire...run, run!...today is... weather report...fire!...sing a song of sixpence... insurance due...Featherstone...fire, fire! There will come soft rains...fire, run, run! Today is...fire...!

In the nursery the walls billow with explosive blushes of color. Blue lions roar, purple giraffes bound off, and flee. Panthers scurry in circles, changing color. Ten thousand animals, running before the fire, vanish off toward a distant steaming river in a torrential patter of hoofs!

The crystal wall shatters again. Wire snap. We hear voices killed in mid-speech.

FIRST VOICE
The weather today is–

SECOND VOICE
Rain, rain, go away, rain–

THIRD VOICE
Insurance is due–

Silence.Tree house trembles.

All the mice lie dead, being eaten by flames.

POETRY VOICE
And Spring herself, when she woke at dawn...
Would scarcely know that we were gone...

The roof explodes up and crashes down.

In the last instant, a final mechanical mouse: scurrying in circles, surrounded by fire, is seen.

Then all smashed under ruin.

Smoke and silence. The house is dead flat to the earth.

Only one wall remains in the night, the remnants of the tape-machinery "thinking" wall. Here and there, in the smoke and silence, we see its transistor batteries feebly speaking.

A last few tapes move slowly in the wall. Two voices intertwine faintly as we move away from the ruin.

POETRY VOICE
...we were gone...

DATE VOICE
Today is March 4th...

POETRY VOICE
...we were gone...

DATE VOICE
...2011...2011...

POETRY VOICE
...gone...

Silence. Smoke. The wind dies. The house is far away now in the night.

CUT TO: The two star-ships, WILDER's rocket and the second rocket, moving in space, traveling silently, rushing at a constant speed.

One rocket flies into the CAMERA, followed by the second. And away from the CAMERA, the two flash on toward the stars.

As Mars grows small behind, a pink disc abandoned in the Deeps.

CUT TO INTERIOR: The CAMERA prowls over the silently working men at their various control banks and stations.

Here we find CHANCE, LUSTIG, HINKSTON, and WILDER at their tasks. Here, also, PEREGRINE and WISWELL, looking out at the vastness of space through a large viewing screen.

CLOSE UP, we see a dot of light moving toward us, growing larger.

WILDER's hands fly over a correlation keyboard, integrating data on the course of the flying object. The object looms on the screen. WILDER hits a red button, a bell clangs, a siren sounds.

A tape jumps through a scanner and we hear:

SIGNAL VOICE (taped)
Condition A, Condition Red.
Condition A, Condition Red.

CHANCE calls out:

CHANCE
Star-ship One to Two. Condition Red. Meteor Ahead.

The men jump and run. In MONTAGE We see men everywhere clap on oxygen helmets and don rocket units clipped to their shoulders.

The CAMERA passes over the Sleepers, suspended and dreaming, all unaware, on their separate Rocket.

The meteor looms!

WILDER, at his screen, calls over the radio:

WILDER
Star-ship Two, veer toward star sector Nine, reduce speed.

The PILOT of star-ship TWO responds and hits the controls.

THE PILOT
Star sector Nine. Speed reduced and veering.

The forward rockets come on and the rocket veers slowly off.

WILDER shouts:

WILDER
Chance? Hold on Collision course.

CHANCE
Collision?

WILDER
Sacrifice. Otherwise, both ships get it. Let's take what impact we can and hope–increase speed, pull ahead.

CHANCE does not hesitate and firms the controls. WILDER slaps on his helmet and scans the data system light-board which flashes figures.

He hits a button which blares a signal bell.

And the standing crew members and the priests recline in their acceleration chairs.

The two rockets fly, one beginning to move ahead of the second as the second slowly veers, firing away.

The meteor is very large, dark, glittering now.

WILDER hits the final control complex.

And the rocket hurls itself on!

WILDER
Star-ship Two, collision imminent. Survivors improbable on this ship. If any survivors, do not turn back. Repeat: Do NOT turn back for survivors. Continue on course for Alpha Seven. No further radio contact with Ship One OR survivors. That is an order. Over and out–

THE PILOT on Star-ship Two repeats it.

THE PILOT
Over and o—

But before he can complete that word the meteor hits Star-ship One a glancing blow. The rocket is spun and ripped asunder like a vast tin box. The crew inside are thrown out in separate directions like silverfish wriggling down the dark void.

The meteor, deflected, rushes off, missing Star-ship Two, which unharmed, veers back into its original course.

Belatedly, the rocket engines explode. A titanic flash of light and heat glares through the darkness, pushing WILDER tumbling, away. Throwing PEREGRINE and WISWELL, who were together, apart. Thrusting CHANGE head-over-heels. Ramming LUSTIG wildly out away from the CAMERA.

The explosion is seen in miniature on the viewscreen of Star-ship Two where the PILOT, grim, pale, touches the controls.

And in the crystal cases, safe, saved by WILDER's sacrifice, the Dreamers dream, the Sleepers sleep, TOMAS GOMEZ among them, unknowing and at peace.

Now, in MONTAGE, the crew of the destroyed ship falls away down space like small black shining meteors.

Now everyone is gone, the stage is empty, the VOID lives to itself. We hear only the radio electricity adrift upon its own banks of silence. We watch the immensity of stars, and the faint dot of Star-ship Two vanishing in space, safely on its journey.

Only gradually now do new creaks and whispers of voices far down the dark well come to us. But finally WILDER's voice, cautious, careful, uncertain, speaks.

WILDER'S VOICE (radio)
Lustig? Hinkston? Chance?

Silence. Static.

WILDER'S VOICE
Father Peregrine?

PEREGRINE'S VOICE
Captain Wilder, praise God! Where <u>are</u> you? Where am <u>I</u>?

The CAMERA drifts back to find WILDER, alone, drifting, falling in wild space.

WILDER (drily)
A good question, Father.

The CAMERA drifts uncontrollably away.

A man falls into the CAMERA from another odd angle. The CAMERA tumbles with him: PEREGRINE.

PEREGRINE
Reverend Wiswell...?

WILDER
He's ten thousand miles from you even as you are now ten thousand miles away from <u>me</u>, Father.

PEREGRINE (with awed dismay)
Oh?...Yes.

The CAMERA slides off atilt as another voice dares speak.

WISWELL
Father? This is Reverend Wiswell.

A body falls. The CAMERA catches and falls with WISWELL.

WILDER plummets across at another angle, vanishing.

WILDER
Reverend!

PEREGRINE'S VOICE
Thank God! you–

A VOICE
Long way down. Long way. Oh, it's a long way down.

WILDER jerks his gaze about.

A VOICE
Oh, it's a long way, long way, long way down...

WILDER
Who's that?

LUSTIG'S VOICE
Sounds like Harley. We can't talk if he interrupts.

WILDER
Lustig, you're all right!

LUSTIG'S VOICE
Relatively speaking.

CLOSEUP: LUSTIG looks around at his terrible falling position in space, hearing the numb voice continue:

THE VOICE (o.s.)
Long long long way, long...

HINKSTON cries out, falling.

HINKSTON
Shut up!

THE VOICE (numbly)
Oh, it's so far...so deep...falling.

LUSTIG speaks:

LUSTIG
Captain, how can we communicate, try to get back together, help each other, if he–

PEREGRINE tries his gentle persuasion.

PEREGRINE
My son...please.

THE VOICE (numbly)
I don't want to die.

PEREGRINE
We are all dying...together.

From the emptiness the voice hears and frozen cold replies:

THE VOICE
No...apart...alone...

CHANCE looks up and sees: Drifting into his line of vision, traveling at almost the same speed, one of the ship's crew, the cause of this interference: HARLEY.

THE VOICE
Long...way...down.

WILDER snaps out:

WILDER
Who is that? I command you: answer me!

THE VOICE
Command? Where are you? I don't see you. Command.
Long...long way down...falling.

Now, for the first time, HARLEY drifts by, eyes wide, mouth slack, he stares at: The spread of stars, the stuff of meteor-dust falling around him.

CHANCE calls.

CHANCE
Captain, I see him!

WILDER
Can you get to him, shut off his radio?

CHANCE fires his rocket pack and zooms up to confront HARLEY, who seizes him like a drowning man.

HARLEY
Don't want to die. Oh, God, help.

CHANCE flails to free the man's terrible grasp, and moves to touch the man's helmet, to knock the antennae loose. The man draws his pistol. CHANCE smashes his fist to the helmet. The glass cracks. The air hisses out. Instantly, the man freezes. His face covers with a thin mask of white crystals. His eyes are frozen wide with frost, held fixed forever under the cold ice shell. CHANCE holds this dead man, unable to believe that he has really killed him.

CHANCE pushes the body. The dead man falls down in darkness, gone.

CLOSEUP, WILDER, after a moment, speaks.

WILDER
Lustig. Hinkston. Chance. Father Peregrine, Reverend Wiswell. You've survived. Who else? Smith? (Silence) Fulton? (Silence) Davis? (Silence)

The stars shine and wheel in a Universe of silence.

The men look around, palely, as they fall.

WILDER nods to himself.

WILDER
Well. That's it.

WISWELL'S VOICE
Captain. Is there nothing we can do?

WILDER responds.

WILDER
No. Our power is fading. We can't make radio contact much longer. Let's do what we can do right: Say goodbye.

We see the faces of the others, one by one, as WILDER's voice speaks across the cold distance.

WILDER'S VOICE
Let's go out by the rules. Fire your motor when answering. Hinkston, your destination?

HINKSTON touches his rocket-pack control. His jets fire.

WILDER sees the tiny new star of HINKSTON's rocket way off there among the billion stars.

HINKSTON'S VOICE
I...I seem to be falling toward...the sun. I should hit it in...what?...about ten months?

HINKSTON looks at the sun, a small, pale disc on black space.

WILDER sees HINKSTON's rocket-fire flick out.

WILDER
Lustig?

Another starfire winks on in another star sector, moving.

LUSTIG'S VOICE
Me? I'm headed, by God...

CLOSEUP we see LUSTIG's scanning the Universe.

LUSTIG (cont.)
...right back to Earth. Imagine that. Earth.

LUSTIG's fire goes out. WILDER speaks.

WILDER
...Chance?

Another fire flames like a tiny star.

CHANCE, CLOSEUP, riding his fire, speaks.

CHANCE
The Great Andromeda Nebula is all mine, give or take a billion miles.

He looks off toward the ghostly presence, the far paleness which haunts the Deeps, the Great Nebula in Andromeda.

WILDER watches CHANCE's flame snuff out.

WILDER
Reverend Wiswell?

The REVEREND looks around at the far exhalation of a pale Comet seen light-years off in another galaxy.

WISWELL
I cannot but hope I...am passing on toward some Comet that will take me in like a foundling child...and deliver me, once each hundred years, on Earth's dear doorstep...and so on and on...forever.

PEREGRINE eyes WISWELL's light which now winks out.

WILDER'S VOICE
And Father, where are <u>you</u>?

PEREGRINE
I have no fire to switch on...yet...I think you <u>might</u> see me...

PEREGRINE's face, CLOSEUP, shimmers with bright metallic reflections, and multi-faceted light.

PEREGRINE
I seem to be caught in a drift of rock. Meteoroids? Great lovely chunks of shining staff. Like the colored bits in the kaleidoscope you held up as a child and gave a shake and now the pattern was this...and now that... lovely...beyond...(fading) description...

We drift away from PEREGRINE and see that indeed he is gravity-pulled and swarmed about by a "school" of meteoroid stuffs. Some flash steel-blue, others red, others dark obsidian flinthead colors, mixed with coppers and flickers of orange.

PEREGRINE'S VOICE
Do you see...?

WILDER'S VOICE
Yes, Father...we see.

Far away the swarming school of asteroids move like a silent and lovely dream.

PEREGRINE'S VOICE (Fading).
...and it's taking me with it...wherever it is going...so beautiful...I don't mind.

There is a flush of ghost static; then silence.

WILDER
Father Peregrine? (Silence) Gone.

Another flush of static.

WILDER
Chance? Reverend Wiswell?

Silence. The great meadow of space has wandered off all the children of the rocket.

WILDER
All gone? (Pause) Gone.

Far away, he sees the small fire of the surviving rocket, moving toward its destiny, a world very far away.

WILDER
Star-ship Two, get on with it.

He looks down now at the nightworld of Mars swinging up, rushing up, below.

WILDER
And there's Mars. I'll hit the atmosphere in twelve hours. I'll...burn like a match.

He falls away from the CAMERA.

WILDER
I wonder...will anyone see?

Wilder plunges into the CAMERA, then away from the CAMERA, falling swiftly, swiftly, faster and then faster, plummeting down the long cold night.

CUT TO: a wheatfield on the planet Mars.

In this huge field of ripened wheat, by night; DRISCOLL and his two sons are busy binding up the harvest.

Suddenly they stand up. A meteor blazes across the sky.

One boy cries out, pointing.

THE BOY
Look! A falling star.

The meteor (which, we can guess, is Wilder's body striking the atmosphere) burns a long bright scar across the night sky.

DRISCOLL, looking up, whispers.

DRISCOLL
Make a wish...make a wish.

The boys gaze high, eyes wide, each making his silent wish.

DRISCOLL watches that long fiery track. The light already is dying on his cheeks.

The "meteor" melts away to mere vapor upon the high evening air.

DRISCOLL glances at his sons.

DRISCOLL
What did you wish for?

THE BOY
To see the Martians.

THE OTHER BOY
Yeah! You promised, last year!

THE BOY
When do we see them?

DRISCOLL rumples their hair.

DRISCOLL
Come on.

They walk, the CAMERA gliding with them, out of the field.

We see the moonlit canal as DRISCOLL and his sons reach the stone rim of the waterway.

THE BOY
Hey, are the Martians here?

DRISCOLL
Yes.

THE OTHER BOY
Can we see them?

DRISCOLL
Look.

He points down.

DRISCOLL
There are the Martians. From this day forward...there they are.

The boys look. The CAMERA shifts down to the flowing dark waters. And there in the moonlit surface we see clearly the reflections of the boys and their father serenely trembled by the waters.

The boys stare.

Their reflections stare back up from the water.

The boys look away over the hills, and then at their father and again at their reflections. They begin to understand. They bend, they point.

Their water images point back at them, smiling, as the CAMERA drifts up and away to scan the broad canvas of Mars, to float over the ancient cities and the new dead and empty towns.

THE STORY TELLER

And it was not the End but the true Beginning. And the new Martians with the name of Driscoll and the sons of the sons of Driscoll did indeed live upon Mars and pass on up away from Mars. For if Earth was the birthing place of humankind, Mars was a Waystation on the voyage toward Eternity. There Man rested a little while in the shade before pressing on with yet more starships into the Universe.

Against a star-filled sky, in utter silence save for the blowing of the soft Martian wind, a boy's hand reaches into the frame.

In the immense boy's hand is a single dandelion blossom gone to seed, full, rich, white and ready. A whisper.

The dandelion fluffs and blows away. All the seeds fly up in the air and away and away to mix with the stars.

We fly with the seeds, we drift on out with the float of dandelion fluffs, among the stars, where the Universe is waiting.

THE END

The Martian Chronicles

1997 SCREENPLAY

Second Draft Revisions

June, 1997

Dawn. Silence. The sky over Cape Canaveral. A few birds lifting up, soaring in the sound of the wind. Then—WHAM! A BLAST of SOUND as a JET roars across the sky.

Again silence. The sun rises. Then WHAM! as a second JET shrieks across the clouds.

WHAM! a third BLAST and a fourth, as two more JETS fire the heavens.

The first JET lands. As does the second, third and fourth.

SWIFT CUTS from JET ENGINE to JET ENGINE as they shut off.

The first JET slides back its cockpit cover. As A PILOT arises we ZOOM IN. It is YORK, the First Expedition to Mars Astronaut.

The second JET lifts its pilot shield. THE PILOT jumps up. ALLEN, from the Second Expedition.

The third JET opens to find BLACK, from the Third Expedition.

And at last, in the fourth JET, representing the future Fourth Expedition, WILDER stands and looks around and waves a salute.

The other three, on their JETS, salute back.

BANG! a brass band starts up in the middle of the Canaveral launching groups.

THE PILOTS glance at them and up at:

More JETS flying, large and small, landing, and dozens and then hundreds of officials, news media, special invitees swarming out.

As the PRESIDENTIAL JET soars down, pulls up, showing it special SEAL.

He appears in the door, raises his arms to all. BANG! the BAND explodes.

THE CROWD roars. ZOOM IN ON a TV REPORTER in the midst of the CROWD.

THE REPORTER
—most amazing day in world history. Four rockets, four teams of astronauts, will launch themselves at intervals of 48 hours, backups for the First Expedition. This time no delays, no setbacks will prevent us from insuring our place in the Universe.

During part of this we CUT from moving CROWD to CROWD, see WILDER and BLACK and the others being greeted, moving toward the celebratory stands.

THE REPORTER
The presidents and kings of every country are here—

We see the PRESIDENTS and KINGS descend from their planes.

THE REPORTER
The greatest living composers have been asked to compose anthems for Mankind's at last breaking free from Earth's gravity. The finest orchestras, the greatest choirs, will play and sing the new Anthem to Space.

We see the COMPOSERS and CHOIRS arriving and the ORCHESTRALS carrying their instruments toward the waiting stands.

CUT TO: A CONDUCTOR moving his baton down!

An ORCHESTRA of 300 pieces responds. We hear two bars of HAIL TO THE CHIEF.

THE CROWD roars.

THE PRESIDENT at the multitudinous microphones, raises his hands. Silence!

THE PRESIDENT
As president, I shall not, repeat, not, make a speech!

THE CROWD laughs quietly.

THE PRESIDENT continues:

THE PRESIDENT
Instead, I am proud to present the man who planned and blueprinted these expeditions. Captain Douglas Wilder!

A single CHORD from the vast ORCHESTRA.

WILDER steps to the microphones.
In a series of QUICK CUTS we see his profile or full face on a thousand small screens, a thousand large, across the world.

CAPTAIN WILDER, CLOSEUP:

WILDER
Why all this? Why leave Earth and reach for Mars and one day head for Alpha Centauri and then, beyond, to the stars? Why?

THE CAMERA MOVES over the multitudes at CANAVERAL.

And flashes for a moment in homes here and there across the world.

And WILDER continues.

WILDER
Because...we are a mystery upon this Earth. How we were born here, we do not know. But somewhere in a billion year history, the eye was invented. We saw the stars and wanted them. This is the end of our wanting and the start of our getting. What will we do out there, beyond? We will give ourselves as gifts to the Universe. For what is the use of a Universe if it is not seen and known? This Earth is a dangerous place. Some year soon the Sun will explode or the Sun will die and us die with it. That must not happen.

As WILDER says this, behind and above him on an immense SCREEN, swift images of the SUN appear, dwindling to die, or exploding to fill the Universe with fire.

He turns to look at the images.

Which fade or flare on the faces of the thousand people gathered below.

WILDER scans the images and continues.

WILDER
We refuse to die. A billion years of Earth's gravity has kept us locked to the ground, envious of the free birds of the air. Now, in this special month, we will break free, escape. If Mars is lifeless, we will give it life. And with Mars as space station seedbed, fly on forever. Why?

WILDER (cont'd)
To be immortal! When we landfall Alpha Centauri and other worlds light years away, our children's children's children will live another million years.

During this last, we PAN OVER THE FACES OF HUNDREDS OF CHILDREN in the LIVE AUDIENCE at Canaveral, and similar FACES OF CHILDREN in their homes, watching WILDER on TV.

WILDER CONTINUES.

WILDER
On this long and splendid journey we will take with us, let us admit, good and evil, light and dark, Ghengis Khan and Hitler as well as Shakespeare, Mohamet, Moses and Jesus of Nazareth. For we love the gift of life and believe that we are worth saving. Space travel is our salvation. Amen to that?

THE MULTITUDES respond quietly.

THE MULTITUDES
...Amen...

WILDER
Now hear this. The names of those whose destiny is Landfall Mars! The crew of Space Craft One. Willard, Williams, Hendricks, Captain Nathaniel York.

In a line the ASTRONAUTS rise to a tremendous roar from the CROWD.

WILDER
Mars Rocket Two...Sherbourne.
Hitchcock. Wilhelm. Captain Roger Allen.

THE CAMERA runs the gamut, finishing with ALLEN.

WILDER
Mars Landfall Rocket Three...Hinkston, Lustig, Rolvaag, Peters. Captain John Black.

The MEN rise, the CAMERA CUTS at last to BLACK.

WILDER
Mars Rocket Four. Cherokee, Riggs, Parkhill, Spender.

THE CAMERA runs the line, pausing at SPENDER long enough to see his doubtful face.

WILDER
With their captain, Wilder...That is...myself.

There is a roar of laughter, applause.

WILDER
God speed to all. God bless and save...our Earth!

THE ORCHESTRAS blast forth. THE CHOIRS sing.

The vast doors of the Vehicle Assembly Building slam aside.

The huge doors glide, the MUSIC sounds, the CHOIRS lift their thousand voices, the CROWD, enchanted, stares.

And we ZOOM UP again to hover over this magnificent stage and the people from every country in the world in the midst of the MUSIC and SONG until the sound is very faint and the light changes and the CROWDS melt away until the tarmac is empty, the ceremonies over, and the wide field waiting for...

THE ROCKET, on its giant tractor treads, moving out in another dawn.

THE ROCKET is in place. Voices whisper, chat, talk, shout. Oxygen vapors rise.

FLIGHT ENGINEER'S VOICE
...eight...seven...six...

And as the VOICE counts down, we INTERCUT, swiftly, CLOSEUPS of the CREWS of all the expeditionary rockets to soon follow.

CLOSEUPS of the Second Space Team, zeroing in on their Captain. Then, swiftly, CLOSEUPS of the Third Teams members, LUSTIG, HINKSTON, and CAPTAIN

BLACK. Then, with terrific impact, CLOSEUPS of the Fourth Expedition's CREW, CAPTAIN WILDER, JEFF SPENDER, PARKHILL and CHEROKEE.

The lips of all move inperceptibly, making the countdown as we hear it from THE FLIGHT ENGINEER.

FLIGHT ENGINEER'S VOICE
...five...four...three...two...

CLOSEUPS of THE CROWDS in the far meadows. INTERCUTS of TV images around the world, faces of families of all colors, shapes and sizes.

FLIGHT ENGINEER'S VOICE
...One!

The last image CLOSEUP is of CAPTAIN WILDER as he repeats the 'One'.

FLIGHT ENGINEER'S VOICE
We have ignition. Blastoff!

A great wall of fire rushes up, ascending, like the vast curtain of an incredible theater.

The ROCKET smashes into the CAMERA.

And the CAMERA pulls away in thunder and an echo of the CHORAL shouting the words to the SPACE ANTHEM, and we see below, looking up, as if into the very heart of the volcanic fires, the CROWD here, the CROWD there, staring up.

The roofs of all the buildings and all the houses in which the crew stand, or the CROWDS stand are transparent, and the CAMERA (THE ROCKET) roars up from each roof, each porch, each meadow, diminishing the figures below which one instant were full face, and now become shapes and now are mere ants, even as the houses, porches, roofs, and meadows fall away in the CHORAL singing and the crash of the BANDS.

The ROCKET fires into space.

And no sooner does this happen then MARS SPACECRAFT TWO takes off.

As does MARS MISSION THREE.

And the fourth ROCKET, with CAPTAIN WILDER aboard.

The ROCKETS, one after another, trail each other into space.

They move like flares now, away from Earth.

As the great blue/white disc becomes smaller and smaller left behind.

And the ROCKETS, four bright flares that now extinguish their fires, move in silence toward MARS until we see only darkness and hear far RADIO VOICES.

THE MOON rides by, a huge pale ghost in the night.

And the FOUR ROCKETS slide on into the Universe.

And THE MOON is left behind.

And THE ROCKETS rush toward a faint red fire.

And suddenly the GREAT CRIMSON DISC OF MARS faces up to us.

As the FOUR ROCKETS arrive in INTERCUT SHOTS, to align themselves at intervals of a thousand miles, while their CAPTAINS give quiet orders and maneuver their crafts.

Until at last, floating and silent, they look down at:

MARS.

CUT TO the interior of MARS CRAFT FOUR and CAPTAIN WILDER.

WILDER
Wilder here. Check in.

We see ROCKET NUMBER ONE swing by, with YORK'S VOICE responding.

YORK'S VOICE
York reporting. Space Craft One.

WILDER nods.

The SECOND SPACESHIP floats by, with THE VOICE of its CAPTAIN.

We hear ALLEN'S VOICE.

ALLEN'S VOICE
Number Two. Allen here. Situation A-O.K.

The THIRD SHIP moves in an orbit around MARS.

BLACK'S VOICE
Black here. Awaiting orders.

WILDER nods.

WILDER
Roger. So far, fine. You have your orbits, check with each other hourly. Stay in constant radio contact. York?

YORK'S VOICE
Sir?

WILDER checks his chronometer.

WILDER
Landfall 18 hours?

YORK'S VOICE
Eighteen.

WILDER (lightly)
Nothing to fear but fear itself?

YORK
Hell, captain, there's no life on Mars, there's no oxygen, no atmosphere. Why would I be afraid?

WILDER
You get an A-plus. York?

YORK
Sir?

WILDER
Good luck.

YORK
Like shooting fish in a barrel...

And as his ROCKET fires its rockets briefly and falls toward MARS, we hear his voice echo "in a barrel...in a barrel..."

WILDER watches THE ROCKET diminish.

BLACK'S VOICE
Captain. Black here.

WILDER
Black!

BLACK
Further orders?

THE ROCKET, far away, is hardly discernible.

WILDER scowls at it for a long moment and then says:

WILDER
Wait. That's all. We just...wait.

The three remaining ROCKETS move in a silent orbit over...

The GREAT RED DISC OF MARS with YORK'S SHIP a mere ghost, vanishing below.

MARS looms and we hold on it and hear far winds blowing and strange musics, perhaps, playing, sounds of harps and soft woodwinds and then merely a sound of dust storms.

As a great cloud of dust, like yet another curtain, blows away and away to reveal a waiting theater of landscape, red hills and foothills and low mountains as the dust settles and the CAMERA prowls over the land in silence, propelled it almost seems by the wind. Along the way it might pause to look at the sky, filling with stars, but nothing else, no moving fire, and then the CAMERA continues until it finds, in the twilight dust and silence, a small crystal dwelling set back in the foothill rocks...

As we approach this low-lying and beautiful structure of crystalline walls and roof we hear the faintest touch of a stringed instrument, perhaps a small harp. With each stroke of this stringed instrument, the CAMERA jumps quietly forward so that we can see a shadow-shape moving inside the walls as a voice half-whispers:

YLLA'S VOICE
Let me touch this book and speak my day. As in all days before.

A stroke of the stringed instrument, as the shadow moves within the house.

YLLA'S VOICE
Again, this is Ylla. Ylla who lives in a fine place in the hills by an ancient canal near a sea long dead.

A stroke of the lyre, the small harp.

YLLA'S VOICE
Each day is much the same. I toss the dust which, when the door is opened, goes forth, taking and cleaning as it goes.

We see the crystal door open and a fine dust that half-glitters, blowing out in a gentle slurry, a dust that takes dust with it.

A stroke of the lyre, perhaps the briefest CLOSEUP of a woman's hand stroking across a strange book with indentations, bas-reliefs and configurations of delicate harp-strings that vibrate and echo YLLA'S voice.

YLLA'S VOICE
That finished, I pick the fruits from the inner garden.

We see her fingers reaching up to pluck a golden fruit from a small tree.

YLLA'S VOICE
And make the twilight meal...

Her hand strokes the lyre-book then, QUICK CUT, her hand dropping small strings of meat into a mirrored lava-pool within the house where the meat simmers.

YLLA'S VOICE
And open the wines...

A stroke of the lyre which echoes her voice in whispers.

YLLA'S VOICE
And then, while waiting for all this to be ready...

Her hand freezes on the harp-strings, the lyre held in her hands.

She appears in the door of the house, as if called. She gazes at the sky. Nothing. The wind rises, murmurs.

She stands forth, lifting her gaze.

The twilight sky over Mars, a vast emptiness of stars.

She waits, shakes her head, half-smiling at her nervous awareness.

She moves to sit outside the door, the lyre-book in her lap, her hand idly strumming the delicate threads. The BOOK whispers what she has already said.

THE HARPBOOK
Ylla, this is her book. My days are much the same.

YLLA (to the HARPBOOK)
Now...rest.

Her hand falls from the lyre which whispers, "rest...rest..."

The night sky stands over Mars as the CAMERA moves in on her profile. We see her eyes move under the lids. Suddenly she blinks her eyes wide and we hear her cry out, as if her voice were somewhere outside her body.

Instantly, in the entrance behind her, A MAN appears to stare down at her. This is her husband YLL, dressed, as is she, in a garment as simple as something worn in other times, by one of Earth's early civilizations, Greek, Roman or Egyptian.

YLL
Ylla?

She is staring at the sky and does not look at him.

YLLA
Yes?

YLL
You called out?

YLLA is confused and almost looks at him.

YLLA
Did I?

YLL
Yes. It was very clear.

YLLA
I must have fallen asleep. I must have dreamed...

YLL accepts this at face value, glancing from her to the sky and back.

YLL
Yes, yes. That must be it.

YLLA (troubled)
And yet...silly...it almost seemed...

YLL
Seemed?

YLLA
Something...

She has risen slowly to examine the stars appearing in the sky at dusk.

YLLA
...nothing.

YLL
Something?

YLLA
In my dreams, and it was only a dream...something moved in the sky.

He examines the heavens over their dwelling.

YLL
A bird? A cloud?

YLLA
No. Very bright. A fire. Yes, a fire.

YLL
I see nothing.

YLLA
Just a dream. But—

She closes her eyes to remember.

YLLA
I dreamed there was the sky and something sparkled and came down softly to land, a long silver craft, round and alien. And a door opened in the side of the silver object and this tall man stepped out.

YLL tries to turn away, but is curious.

YLLA
A tall man. Black hair, blue eyes, and white skin! How strange.

YLL (moving off)
I don't believe in dreams!

YLLA
Nor do I, but...He looked at me and he said, 'I've come from the third planet. My name is Nathaniel York—'

YLL
A stupid name.

YLLA (softly)
Stupid, yes. A dream. But he said, 'This is the first trip across space from Earth; that's the name of our world.' he said. 'Earth.' And somehow I understood him. With my mind. Telepathy.

YLL moves away but stops when:

YLLA (quietly)
Yll? Do you ever wonder if there are people alive on the third planet?

YLL
The third planet cannot support life. There's far too much oxygen in their atmosphere.

YLLA looks at the sky.

YLLA
But wouldn't it be fascinating if there were people? And they traveled through space?

YLL
Enough! I'm hungry.

He vanishes in the doorway. YLLA hears the merest whisper.

In her hands, the small BOOK with its lyre pages rustles with the merest hint of distant music.

CLOSEUP of the HARPBOOK. We hear its strange song.

She quiets it, glances at the sky and moves away. CUT TO:

The liquid silver pool where the meats are being brought forth, steaming, to be placed on plates as her husband watches, alert, watching her. He turns to sit and she dips more meats in the quiet waters but hesitates.

For the HARPBOOK, placed on the rim of the table, has strummed a small whisper-song.

As she prepares her own dish, an echo of that song breathes from her mouth.

YLLA (the faintest murmur)
Drink to me only with thine eyes, and I will drink with mine…

She stops, hearing herself, and glances out the door at the dry sea bottom where the wind wanders by, all dust.

YLL looks up from eating as she turns back to seat herself across from him.

YLLA (a whisper)
Or leave a kiss within the cup, And I'll not ask for wine…

YLL
What song is that?

YLLA
Song?

YLL
You were just singing.

She is puzzled, having only half-heard the music from her lips.

YLLA
It just came into my mind. And the words—

YLL
Peculiar words.

He stops, for the HARPBOOK strums in the wind an echo of the song.

YLL
You must have written it in your book.

She looks at the book, which hums faintly.

YLLA
I must have.

YLL rises.

YLL
I appreciate your song. But, there is finer music in town. Shall we go there?

YLLA (stiffens)
Now?

YLL
We haven't been out for an evening in months. So—

She has half risen, looks out the door at: Dust blowing by in the night. The HARPBOOK strums softly.

YLLA
You hate music.

YLL
Let us say I have taken a sudden interest. Well?

He steps away.

YLLA
No.

YLL
No?!

YLLA picks up her spoon and starts to eat again.

YLLA
I must stay here.

YLL
Must?!!!

YLLA will not look at him.

YLLA
I don't know why, but tonight I must.

YLL stands across the table from her, making fists, almost inarticulate.

The wind blows by the door. The HARPBOOK strums softly, echoing her song.

YLLA
Please. You're hungry.

He glares at his food and at last sits heavily.

YLL
Hungry? Is <u>that</u> what I am?

He eats two or three mouthfuls and then stops.

YLL
This craft. This ship. Where did it land?

YLLA tries to be amused.

YLLA
A dream, Yll. A dream.

He still frowns at his plate.

YLL
Where?

She closes her eyes to remember, at last nods.

YLLA
Over the valley between two valleys. The place of red silver. But—

He stares into his food.

YLL
A dream, eh? Well, I am hungry.

He attacks his food.

As YLLA watches, bemused, and puts down her utensils.

The HARPBOOK is humming softly.

We see her put her hands down to mute the quiet whispers.

But the LYREBOOK vibrates its slender strings, echoing.

YLL leaps up.

YLL
That does it!

INSTANT CUT TO: The night sky and rushing across it, closer and closer, a strange craft, a cloud of FLAMEBIRDS, bearing YLL and YLLA.

Within the canopy of fiery creatures, YLLA looks at:

Her home of crystal pillars, receding.

YLL watches from the corners of his eyes.

YLLA raises her gaze to the stars.

YLL notes this quietly, then nods his head down. This motion causes their fiery vehicle to descend.

They land by an amphitheater where an audience is moving in.

YLL and YLLA go with them to settle in the amphitheater where they sit among multitudinous shadows.

On stage, THE MUSICIANS in costumes of pale blue and gold, position their lyres, lutes, woodwinds.

The AUDIENCE leans forward.

The music begins, a lovely overture to the night, carried by strings, instruments much like oboes, flutes, pipes.

YLL glances at YLLA.

YLLA lowers her gaze from the sky and listens to the music.

The LYREBOOK she has carried in her arm stirs.

YLL hears but ignores.

YLLA pretends not to notice.

The music on stage continues, a fluid outpouring of the night, the stars, the land.

Again, CLOSEUP, the LYREBOOK sounds its golden threads, softly.

On-stage, the MUSIC of the players changes. One or two strange notes sound.

THE MUSICIANS stiffen, puzzled.

THE AUDIENCE is startled.

The LYREBOOK in YLLA'S arms, sings quietly.

And on-stage the MUSICIANS, as if called by the wind, hypnotized, play another four or five notes of a song that we know has somehow arrived from EARTH.

THE MUSICIANS struggle quietly to regain their own original music.

THE AUDIENCE leans forward.

As does YLL.

But YLLA pulls back, sensing that her small half-hidden LYRE is causing this music.

THE MUSICIANS are truly alarmed.

CLOSEUP, we see their numbed fingers trying to pull away.

CLOSEUP, those who sound their flutes or pipes shut their eyes to refuse this music.

CLOSEUP of the SINGERS who touch their hands to their mouths to stop the words springing forth.

THE AUDIENCE half rises.

As does YLL, staring at:

YLLA, who shuts her eyes!

THE MUSICIANS panic and play on.

YLLA claps her hand to the hidden LYRE. It stops!

THE MUSICIANS on-stage collapse with relief, pull back, and run into the night.

THE AUDIENCE, muted in their panic, abandons the theater.

YLL stares at their strange departure.

YLLA, behind her eyelids, hears the leave taking.

The amphitheater is empty.

YLLA waits.

We see YLL and YLLA, isolated, in the midst of the night and the empty arena.

YLL at last puts his hand down to:

Touch YLLA'S cheek.

At this, she blinks her eyes wide. SWIFT CUT TO:

The FLAMEBIRDS burning down the sky to light the parquetry in front of their crystal home.

As it lands, YLLA leaps out and runs into the house.

While YLL can only witness her flight.

The FIREBIRDS fly up to vanish up in the sky, as YLL closes his eyes to consider all that has happened. DISSOLVE TO:

The night sky over the empty land.

Inside the sleeping house, all is quiet.

THE CAMERA prowls through the silent house, among the crystal pillars...

To find YLL seated, turning the pages of his own HARPBOOK when suddenly he grows alert. He hears something. We hear YLLA'S voice, talking, quietly, in her sleep.

YLL nods and moves, the CAMERA with him, until he looks down at:

YLLA, asleep, but her mouth shadowed with whispers.

YLL leans down over her.

YLL
...yes?

Her lips move, she is in her dream.

YLLA
...yes...

She smiles. YLL controls himself.

YLL
Has he come from the sky again?

She nods, deeply asleep.

YLL
His name?

YLLA (murmuring)
...York...but only a dream...

YLL
A dream, yes. And this craft, this ship...where does it land?

YLLA (whispering)
...valley...

YLL
What?

YLLA
...silver. Valley...dream.

She realizes, half-waking, she is being questioned.

He looks out at the sky.

YLL
How soon?

YLLA (a whisper)
Soon.

Her eyes move beneath their lids.

YLL (softly)
Sleep. Rest.

Her head falls to one side. She breathes quietly.

YLL moves quickly from the room.

The night wind blows. The twin moons of Mars sail across the heavens.

The curtains in YLLA'S room blow out over her bed. She stirs.

At last she sits up, almost as if in a dream, and moves to put on a silken coat.

As she glides into the living quarters, YLL, who is seated nearby, speaks.

YLL
Where are you going this late?

CLOSEUP, turned away from him, she prepares a lie.

YLLA
To Pao's. I forgot. I promised to visit.

YLL
Ah, yes. Pao's. She lives...where?

YLLA is alarmed at the question, but answers.

YLLA
Silver valley.

YLL
Silver valley, of course.

He rises quickly.

YLL
But you can't go.

She turns to stare at him as he puts on a coat, not looking at her.

YLL
I forgot an appointment, too. Doctor Viorr, yes, the good doctor, will be here...soon. I must go out. You must stay here.

YLLA
But...

YLL
You must wait.

She almost protests.

YLL (a beat)
Yes?

YLLA (at last)
Yes.

YLL
Good!

He turns and pulls an incredible bright weapon from its place on the wall. It hums in his hands like a hive of bees.

YLLA
What?!

YLL
No, no, I'm not going hunting. The good doctor is coming to borrow this. I must test fire it to make sure it works properly! Entertain the good doctor! I will be back (a beat) soon.

Before she can protest...

YLL stalks from the house.

He recedes across the desert, away from their dwelling.

CLOSEUP, she watches in defeat when:

From behind her, the LYREBOOK stirs with its strange tune.

She hurries to stand over it.

The music is louder, as if its source were coming closer.

The music stops. She picks up the LYREBOOK as if to make it sing softly again and turns to the doorway to look out at the desert and the sky.

She sinks down to sit and wait, outside the door.

As she sits, the LYREBOOK stirs again, softly.

YLLA
Yes? Yes?

The music grows louder.

The wind blows and in the sky, not far off, there is an illumination, obscured by blown mist or cloud. Thunder.

The LYREBOOK sounds louder, quicker, passionately.

She looks from it to the sky, her face feverish.

YLLA
Soon? No...now!

The thunder is gone as is a half-seen fiery cloud.

The music plays more quietly.

YLLA scans the horizon.

YLLA
The landing...he is here.

She leans forward as the music rises!

She half-rises when:

CRACK, a rifle-sound, intermixed with an incredible shriek of insects, bees released in a lightning swarm. Then silence.

The LYREBOOK goes dead.

Panicked, she looks at it, guessing why it is silent.

Far off, footsteps.

She quickens with some faint hope.

YLLA
Can it be...? Maybe?

The footsteps are louder.

She stumbles forward, feverish with anxiety, staring.

A shadow moves on a small rise just beyond.

Her eyes widen. She gasps. But...

YLL steps out of the shadows, slapping his weapon.

YLL
Good. Splendid! Did the good doctor come?

YLLA, pale, eyes shut, shakes her head.

YLL
Well, when he does, this is his. In good shape. Now I am <u>really</u> hungry. Will you fix something?

She stares at the landscape.

YLLA
Did you shoot something out there?

YLL
Shoot? Ah, yes. A beast. Some sort of wild creature!

He vanishes in the house. THE CAMERA moves with him to fix the rifle against the wall. He notices YLLA moving quietly to the silver lava cooking table where, without looking, she drops the cubes of food in to cook.

The LYREBOOK gives a faint harping sound.

She hears and concentrates, trying to recall something. Her lips move to try to sing this something.

YLL watches.

As a single tear moves down her cheek.

YLL
Ylla?

YLLA touches the tear.

YLLA
Why am I crying? What?

The LYREBOOK sounds a last note, fading.

YLLA
That song. I can't remember it. I try but...no.

Another tear moves down her face.

YLL sits, waiting.

YLL
You'll be allright...tomorrow.

She turns with his plate.

YLLA
Yes...I'll be all right...

In turning, the plate knocks the LYREBOOK to the floor.

We see it land with a hum of quiet strings.

She looks down but does not bend to pick it up.

She places the plate before YLL and whispers.

YLLA
...tomorrow...

The LYREBOOK hums: a single note. CUT TO:

THE CAMERA looks at the crystal front of their home and rises swiftly, up a hundred, a thousand feet, then ten miles, a hundred!

Until MARS is a great crimson disc filling the screen with just the sound of the wind.

THE CAMERA spins about to regard all of space, and three distant moving objects, the other THREE SPACECRAFT, separated by distance. We hear RADIO VOICES, a spiderweb of sound as delicate as the LYREBOOK.

THE CAMERA rushes toward MARS ROCKET TWO as THE VOICES rise and diminish.

And then at MARS ROCKETS THREE AND FOUR. And each time we swim in at them we hear echoes of the Martian wind blowing across the landscape beyond the crystal pillars of YLL and YLLA'S dwelling, and a faint pringling lyre-harp vibration, a prickle of the fine hairs on the backs of our necks and in our ears as:

We hear WILDER'S VOICE rising and falling and then coming to clear focus on the inter-rocket radio lines.

WILDER'S VOICE
Come in, Mars One. Wilder here. Mars One, do you read me...?

The THREE SPACECRAFT drift in silence with the far wind blowing, and that faint echo of the LYRE.

ALLEN'S VOICE
Nothing, captain.

CUT TO WILDER in MARS FOUR, with SPENDER, PARKHILL and the rest of his crew beyond, alert, pale.

WILDER
Allen?

ALLEN'S VOICE
Allen, Mars Two.

WILDER
Stand clear, Allen. We—

ALLEN'S VOICE
It's no use, captain.

CUT TO ALLEN in his craft.

ALLEN
We've been in reception mode five minutes. Nothing.

BLACK'S VOICE (cuts in)
Mars Three, captain. Confirmed.

CUT TO BLACKS SPACECRAFT. BLACK at the radio unit.

BLACK
...silence.

ALLEN'S VOICE:

ALLEN
Captain? Sir?

THE SPACE CRAFT run silently around MARS with the sound of the wind and the fading LYRE-HARP sounds.

MARS is immense and crimson.

BLACK
Captain?

CLOSEUP, eyes shut, WILDER manages to answer.

WILDER
Wilder here.

CUT TO MARS TWO, exterior. ALLEN'S voice.

ALLEN
Awaiting orders, captain.

CUT TO MARS THREE. BLACK'S voice.

BLACK
Orders, captain.

THE CRAFT drift by and become small around the far side of MARS.

CUT TO WILDER:

WILDER (almost to himself)
Orders...yes.

ALLEN
May I offer an alternative landfall plan, sir?

WILDER (nods, eyes shut)
Give us the plan.

CUT TO ALLEN in his craft.

ALLEN
That we consolidate our flights. Mars Two, Three and Four land simultaneously.

WILDER
All three?

ALLEN
To protect ourselves.

CUT TO WILDER and then to THE MEN in the other TWO CRAFT, swiftly INTERCUT.

WILDER
Are you suggesting we land where York landed?

CUT TO ALLEN.

ALLEN
I am, sir.

WILDER shakes his head.

WILDER
No, no. Original landfalls, at distances removed. York's position must not, repeat not, be our own.

BLACK'S VOICE
But, captain—

WILDER (cuts him off)
We will search for, and perhaps find, York at the proper time. Another plan would endanger our entire force. Allen!

CUT TO ALLEN.

ALLEN
Sir!?

WILDER gives the order.

WILDER
Mars Two, northern rim of the Great Abyss. Over and down!

ALLEN'S VOICE
Abyss landfall. Over and down!

We see ALLEN'S SPACECRAFT fire its retro-rockets and vanish from the trio of ships, falling toward MARS.

And MARS looms up in a drift of wind and a final echo of the VOICE-HARP.

And below, growing nearer and nearer and opening like a great crimson mouth, the Grand Canyon of MARS, as long as the United States in length, as wide as the United States in width.

THE ROCKET falls down almost as if to vanish in the Abyss.

And veers off to one side.

From below we see it coming down.

And from the rim of the Abyss see it land.

And the port open.

And THE MEN climb down the ladder.

And their feet, one by one, landing on the red dust of MARS.

ALLEN looks around, amongst his THREE CREW MEN.

One of them adjusts a device on his helmet, laughs, pops his helmet wide.

ALLEN (startled)
Watch it! What!?

THE MAN laughs, takes a deep breath, exhales.

THE MAN
Air, captain. Oxygen.

ALLEN
No.

THE MAN
Yes. Mars has an atmosphere. Damn and hell, captain, damn and hell. (breathes deeply)

The OTHER MEN and ALLEN pull off their helmets, stunned and mightily pleased. They look around.

ALLEN nods off away from the Abyss.

ALLEN (narrowing his eyes)
This would seem to be the direction.

THE MEN look, see something, nod and agree.

THE MEN
My God...oh, Lord. Yes. (a beat) Sir.

DISSOLVE to THE CAMERA WALKING toward one of the dwellings. THE CAMERA IS THE TEAM. We cannot see them, but only hear their footsteps and their muted voices until at last:

THE CAMERA stands before one of the arched doorways of one of the dwellings.

A hand reaches out from around the edge of the CAMERA. A gloved hand. The hand of CAPTAIN ALLEN, which hesitates.

A VOICE
Go on, Captain.

ALLEN
What if nobody's home?

A VOICE
Try. And see.

The hand knocks. Almost immediately the door bangs wide. MRS. TTT is there, indignant.

MRS. TTT
Well?

ALLEN (astounded)
You speak English!

MRS. TTT
I speak what I speak.

ALLEN
It's wonderful English!

THE MEN behind, smile.

MRS. TTT (hands on hips)
And?

ALLEN (smiling)
And!? I'm Captain Allen.

MRS. TTT (closing her eyes)
I know, I know.

ALLEN (hesitates, then blurts)
Commander of Mars Mission Two from...

MRS. TTT (eyes shut)
...from the Planet Earth. Yes, yes, of course. What took you so long?

THE CREW try to see over their CAPTAIN'S shoulders.

ALLEN
So long? Nearly three hundred million miles from Earth to Mars and...This is the fourth planet from the Sun?

MRS. TTT
Of course! But if you want to use the proper name, Tir.

ALLEN
Ah! A fine name! Tir!

MRS. TTT
Well?

ALLEN
Well...(laughs)...as you said, I'm Captain of the Second Expedition from Earth.

MRS. TTT
We've been through all that, yes?

MRS. TTT (cont'd)
(shuts eyes) There was an expedition before you, it vanished.

ALLEN
You know! (to his men) She knows!

THE CREW move closer, confused.

MRS. TTT
But, there are so many of you!

ALLEN
Yes! Lieutenants Young, Rollins and Wilson.

THE MEN mutter hellos, uneasily.

MRS. TTT (cuts in)
Congratulations Captain! All these voices! My! It is the illusion of the hour, the delusion of the day, the cliché of the moment.

ALLEN
You don't understand.

MRS. TTT
I understand completely, it is your thought that disturbs. I am very busy. You evidently wish to see Mr. Ttt.

ALLEN
Yes!

MRS. TTT
He's busy!

She slams the door.

From inside, we hear his knock.

The door is thrust open again.

MRS. TTT (points)
Mind your feet!

THE CAPTAIN looks in dismay at his dusty boots.

ALLEN
My God, we should be celebrating!

MRS. TTT
Wait! Perhaps Mr. Ttt will see you!

The sound of her feet flutter through the house.

There is a sound of quarreling. The MEN in the doorway stare at one another, shifting on their boots.

MRS. TTT suddenly reappears.

MRS. TTT (astonished)
You're still here! I still see you!

ALLEN
Of course!

MRS. TTT
Mr. Ttt is busy. It's Mr. Aaa you must see. (she points) The next farm. (hands ALLEN a thin metal strip) A prescription! He'll advise what to do.

ALLEN
We've done it, crossed millions of miles of space...

MRS. TTT (nods condescendingly, eyes shut)
Yes, yes. It's been a dreadfully long trip, and a celebration would be nice. (opens her eyes) Predictable! Go see Mr. Aaa...he'll solve your problems. Go, go!

ALLEN and his MEN back off.

MRS. TTT
That's a good Captain!

MRS. TTT slams the door. THE CREW stare at each other.

ROLLINS
Good Lord!

YOUNG
You think all Martians are this crazy, Captain?

WILSON
What now?

ALLEN
Take her advice. Go!

He points and marches!

CUT TO: THE CAMERA, some forty feet away, advances with the sound of footsteps upon a small GIRL playing with a yo-yo sort of spider which climbs and descends. She does not notice the approach of the four weary MEN who circle her, hopefully.

ALLEN (uneasily)
Hi.

GIRL (does not look up)
Hi.

ALLEN
I've a son back home, your age. Wait'll I tell him he'll have playmates here on Mars.

GIRL (works the spider)
Tir.

ALLEN (even more uneasily)
Yes. Tir. Well, listen.

He half-kneels. She keeps stringing her spider.

ALLEN
A spaceship landed near here a few days ago. We've come to find it, okay?

GIRL (playing with her spider)
Okay.

ALLEN
I'm Captain Allen. These are my crew.

GIRL (recites)
And never before in all history has anyone ever crossed space in a great ship!

ALLEN
Good!

GIRL (shrugging)
Telepathy.

ALLEN (continues, lamely)
Well, then, will you help us!

GIRL
Go see Mr. III. He'll help!

She runs off. A voice speaks behind ALLEN.

MR. III
Help?

THE MEN turn quickly. MR. III is there!

ALLEN
MR. III?

MR. III (nods)
If you name your problem, you can solve your problem.

ALLEN
Listen!

MR. III
I'm listening. (shuts eyes) Proceed.

ALLEN (taking a breath)
We're from Earth. That's not your name for our planet, but...if I make mental images of our world...

MR. III
Do!

ALLEN shuts his eyes, concentrates. MR. III describes what he sees in ALLEN'S mind.

MR. III (reciting)
Tall glass, metal cities, blue seas—nice. (a beat) Spacecraft technology? A ship, lifting off, flying days, months. (a beat) Great red planet. Settling here!

ALLEN
You understand!!

MR. III (produces stylus and pad)
Clearly! Sign here!

ALLEN
Sign?

MR. III
You're from Earth! So, sign! A formality!

ALLEN (takes the pad)
Do my men sign, too?

MR. III (excited)
Your men sign? Superb. I must tell Mr. XXX! (points) That's the provision for sleeping. Mr. XXX will make the arrangements after your interview. Here is the key!

ALLEN grabs it eagerly, honored.

MR. III
No, no, your picture is wrong. It's not the key to the city, it's the key to the house! (points) Fourth building. Spend the night. I will send Mr. XXX to see you.

He starts to go but senses something in ALLEN'S mind.

MR. III (impatiently)
What are you waiting for? Oh, yes...of course. (ecstatic, shaking hands) Congratulations! Well done! Welcome!

ALLEN (dazed)
Thanks.

MR. III (exits)
Use that key!

THE CREW are now totally confused. ALLEN stares at the key.

CUT TO: They advance to a final building. ALLEN fits the key in the lock and they step into a large room.

THE MEN are surrounded by shadows in costumes and masks, etc. One steps forward.

MR. UUU
Welcome! I'm Mr. Uuu!

ALLEN
Captain Allen from Earth!

Pandemonium, chaos, shouts and yells. The CROWD surge forward with whistles,

stompings, shouts to pummel THE CREW, happily.

At last the MOB pulls away. The CREW wipe tears from their eyes, shaking their heads, holding each other with emotion.

ALLEN (shaken, eyes brimful)
Thank you! Thank you!

The CROWD murmurs, pleased.

MR. UUU (shakes hands)
Welcome, indeed! It's good to see another man from Earth.

ALLEN (excited)
Another? You mean Captain York, the first mission, is here?

MR. UUU (touches himself)
I mean I am from Earth...

THE CROWD (murmuring)
...Earth...

MR. UUU
...also.

ALLEN (dismayed)
Hold on. What country are you from?

Above UUU's head, ghostly visions swarm.

MR. UUU
Tuierol. I came by the Spirit...

CROWD (pantomiming)
...Spirit...

All about the CROWD and the ASTRONAUTS great continental apparitions rise in tidal waves.

MR. UUU
...Spirit of my body...years ago!

ALLEN
Tuierol?

MISS RRR (steps forward)
And I am from Earth, also.

MR. WWW
And I!

MR. NNN
And I!

Ghost jungles appear in green smokes and green fires on the air.

MISS RRR
I come from Orri, on Earth, a place of jungles—all green forever! And all the cities...

CROWD
...cities...

MISS RRR
...cities are silver!

She pantomimes the jungle, the green. The others imitate her without looking at her and it all comes in drowning waves around them.

MR. NNN
Earth is water. All water with cities in the sea!

The oceans appear faintly on the air.

MR. WWW
Earth is dust—

The dust storms blow away the water.

THE OTHERS
...dust...

The CREW backs off.

YOUNG (uneasily)
Captain, what the hell!

ALLEN
Easy, easy...

ROLLINS
Easy, hell! They're not from Earth, look at their skin!

ALLEN has been turning, searching.

WILSON
Captain, these walls are solid, and there are no windows!

ALLEN
No. Now I know why they gave me the key. We're... in an...

YOUNG
Where, sir?

ALLEN
An asylum.

The lights begin changing as ALLEN and his MEN are surrounded by the shadows of dreams and fantasies. INMATES become statues and pillars of mists and clouds that float away only to come back as strange beasts. In the midst of it all, the MEN, intrigued but alarmed.

ALLEN
Not only are they mad, but they're able to project their madness!

YOUNG
Then they think we're crazy, too---and we are projecting our fantasies about Earth!

ROLLINS
Yeah! They think we need treatment! That's why they had you sign those damn forms!

WILSON
How long will they keep us here?

YOUNG
Until we prove we're not crazy!

WILSON
Do you think there's a way out, sir?

MR. NNN
Of course!

MR. UUU
Just open...

INMATES
...open...

MR. UUU
...open the door...

ALLEN
But the key...

MISS R
That's to keep people from getting in.

MR. UUU
Only those who deserve to get in...

INMATES
...get in!

YOUNG is at the door, pushing!

YOUNG
Captain, yes. It's open!

ALLEN
Let's go!

THE MEN
Out! Out!

The MEN move swiftly out as the INMATES live their fantasies.

The door slams.

The MEN are immediately confronted by MR. X who steps from the shadows.

MR. XXX
Captain Allen! What are you doing outside?

ALLEN
We're getting the hell away from that asylum you trapped us in!

MR. XXX
Asylum! How curious!

ALLEN
You think we're insane.

MR. XXX
I do not think that you all are insane. (points) Just you! Your friends are secondary hallucinations.

YOUNG
Captain, he thinks you imagined us!

MR. XXX
Your projections seem solid. If you were cured, made well, they would vanish.

ALLEN
If my men are imaginary...projections...

YOUNG (cutting in)
Then hell! Cure him! and make us vanish.

ROLLINS
Make us disappear!

MR. XXX
Not easy. Your case is unique. This recent outbreak of mass psychosis seems to manifest in several stages. The people in that house are simpler forms, but your projections of Earth and Earth men are fully auditory, optical - olfactory. The most detailed hallucinations I have ever seen!

ALLEN
So! Touch these men! They're solid, breathing human beings! Not figments of my imagination! Touch!

MR. XXX gingerly reaches out to touch one of the CREW. He pulls back, astonished.

ALLEN
There! Proof?!

MR. XXX
It proves the crisis of your sickness!

CLOSEUP:

ALLEN
How can I prove that I don't need curing?

MR. XXX
A fascinating paradox, sir.

YOUNG
Captain...the Lander!?

ALLEN (nods)
We'll show you our ship!

CLOSEUP:

MR. XXX
Your ship! Will you manifest it here?

ALLEN
No, because I can't. Will you follow?

MR. XXX
Lead!

DISSOLVE TO: The CAPTAIN and his CREW marching, followed by MR. XXX. They stop. We hear a humming sound. They ALL stare off at the Lander.

ALLEN
There! A Type 2.SDX Lander.

MR. XXX (delighted)
Amazing! How grand! It is all there!

ALLEN
Every rivet, every bolt!

MR. XXX
I hear it humming!

ALLEN
The generators!

MR. XXX touches all about the Lander, sniffing, staring.

MR. XXX
Never have I seen such a complexity! Metal, rubber—the shadows on the ground! Congratulations! You... are a psychotic genius! I will write my greatest monograph on this. You have signed the euthanasia forms...?

ALL (panicked)
Captain!

MR. XXX
You are incurable! We shall sleep you away. Free your spirit from your diseased body. It should be most engrossing to watch your imaginary projections vanish!

ALLEN
Imaginary projections? Damn! I'm Captain Allen, Commander of Mars Mission Two!

MR. XXX aims a laser pistol.

MR. XXX
Oh my, yes!!

He fires. Surprised, ALLEN falls dead.

The other MEN run. MR. XXX fires. They ALL fall. MR. XXX trembles and steps forward, staring.

MR. XXX
Still...here...?

He blinks at the bodies, which have not vanished, then turns to stare at the Lander. He shivers.

MR. XXX
No...the ship...impossible! (a beat) His dream is in my mind!

He goes over to one of the bodies, gets down on his knees and dares to slowly touch the "dream body" that will not go away. He gasps and pulls back, shrieking.

MR. XXX
I refuse you!

He looks at all the bodies, almost hysterical. A sudden, dangerous calm sweeps over him as he slowly feels his own arms and face.

MR. XXX (quite logically)
Incurable...of course.

He looks at his gun.

MR. XXX
The cure?!

He lifts his laser gun to his chin and pulls the trigger. The gun fires, throwing him back, dead.

As the CAMERA pulls back and back to view the carnage from the POV of the Lander, WILDER'S RADIO VOICE speaks, amidst static.

WILDER'S VOICE
Spacecraft Two, do you read me? Spacecraft Two, Wilder here. Spacecraft Three is prepared to landfall. Over and out.

The four bodies lie in the sun. MR. XXX lies where he fell as THE CAMERA pulls up and away from the empty and abandoned craft, the bodies, and a landscape filled with a wind of dust which erases the scene.

We see MARS, a full red disc, with the sound of the wind, then spin our CAMERA around to see SPACECRAFT THREE and SPACECRAFT FOUR rushing silently by.

CUT TO:

WILDER at the TV and RADIO CONTROLS, just finishing...

WILDER
...out. Spacecraft Three?

CUT TO CAPTAIN BLACK in his ship.

BLACK
Here, captain.

A VOICE (cuts in)
Madness.

QUICK CUT TO WILDER and, behind him, a shadow which echoes the same words.

SPENDER
Madness!

WILDER is stunned. If this isn't insubordination, it is close on to it.

WILDER
Spender!

SPENDER steps forward, pale and driven.

SPENDER
My God, captain, we've lost half our ships, fifty percent of our expedition!

BLACK'S VOICE
Captain?!

WILDER (as calm as possible)
On hold, Black. On hold.

He turns to confront SPENDER.

WILDER
Well, mister?

SPENDER jabs a console tab, and then another. On the large screen confronting them, MARS looms closer and closer.

SPENDER
Are you blind? Closeup, now. Closer. Don't you see? It doesn't want us here!

WILDER
It, Spender, it!

SPENDER
Mars!

WILDER
It's only a planet, Spender.

SPENDER stares at the screen.

SPENDER
No, it's a world. Can't you feel it? A world like ours, a long time ago. But dead or almost dead and now we come to stir its bones.

WILDER looks from SPENDER to the huge screen.

WILDER
Has it told you that?

SPENDER studies WILDER and then the huge Red Planet.

SPENDER
When I sleep, yes. Bad dreams. I can't prove, but dreams, yes, and bad. Look at that canyon, that huge mouth across Mars. Don't you hear it? Does it say nothing to you?

WILDER
I hear nothing.

SPENDER
Deaf then as well as blind.

He studies the Red World.

CLOSEUP, we move in on the immense canyon, the great Abyss.

SPENDER
It'll swallow us whole!

WILDER studies the screen and shakes his head.

WILDER
It will not. I won't let it.

SPENDER
God help you, then. God help us all.

The image on the screen looms.

WILDER cannot take his eyes away from it.

BLACK'S VOICE
Captain.

A long beat and then without looking at SPENDER, WILDER says:

WILDER
Permission to land?

SPENDER'S face changes color, he sinks in on his own silence.

SPENDER
I am not the captain, sir.

WILDER, eyes shut, speaks.

WILDER
You are not. (swiftly) Black!?

BLACK'S VOICE
Sir?!

WILDER
Landfall fourteen hours.

SPENDER turns abruptly away.

CUT TO BLACK in his ship.

BLACK
Landfall fourteen!

INSTANT CLOSEUP of the retro-rockets in full blast.

The THIRD EXPEDITIONARY ROCKET plunges toward MARS.

The great Abyss smiles to welcome it.

As SPENDER falls into his bunk and turns to shut his eyes and listen for the voices which, invisible and unheard, speak of immediate futures.

CUT TO IMMENSE FOG sweeping across MARS.

At a distance, a ROCKET ILLUMINATION and its roar which cuts. The fire goes out. The sound dies.

THE FOG rolls on and we hear, at last, distant VOICES in the mist.

Then, as THE CAMERA MOVES, a small LINE OF MEN move out of the mist.

THE CAMERA CLOSES IN ON HINKSTON, the first to step out of the dawn shadows. He stops and listens. Silence.

THE CAMERA SHIFTS to his right to find CAPTAIN BLACK, and then HENLEY.

HINKSTON takes off his helmet.

BLACK and HENLEY likewise.

BLACK
Wonderful...(a beat) so far.

This makes them burst into wild laughter, hugging one another, then turn to take deep breaths from the thin air.

There is silence, broken by a sound.

THE MEN look at one another.

The sound comes again, now unmistakable through the mist. A ROOSTER CROWING far away.

HINKSTON
Captain? Did you hear what I heard?

BLACK
Shhh! Wait!

The ROOSTER CROWS again. BLACK stares, amazed, into the mist and the swirling fog.

HENLEY
Listen!

HINKSTON
A rooster crowing on Mars, sir?

HENLEY
Captain. Look!

We see their POV, the mist is slowly lifting, and we hear faint PIANO MUSIC, one bar of "BEAUTIFUL OHIO" and see dim shapes of trees, faint outlines of buildings.

THE MEN peer through the mist.

BLACK looks up and around.

BLACK
Dear God! Oak trees! Elms!

HENLEY
Maples!

The shapes of trees and buildings are now clearer through the mist.

THE MEN move slowly towards the ghostly images, plus BIRDS CHIRPING, RADIOS playing, A CAR HORN, etc. We hear a LAWNMOWER.

HINKSTON
Hey!

HENLEY
Someone cutting grass?

HINKSTON
Captain, look! Lawns! Green as far as you can see!

BLACK
Shhh!

They hear the BIRDS and look up.

BIRDS flit from branch to branch in the dawn trees, singing.

HENLEY
Birds?

BLACK turns around, gazing up.

BLACK
Songbirds, roosters, trees?

HINKSTON
And, hey! Hold on!

The wind blows more of the mist away.

BLACK
Buildings.

HINKSTON
A town!

We see the town in the early morning light as final wreaths of mist lift. We see trees and houses that could have been built in the early twentieth century, in the American mid-west.

Out of the mist, BLACK and his MEN move, approaching the town.

HENLEY names it.

HENLEY
Illinois!

HINKSTON
Iowa!

BLACK, looking left and right, narrows his eyes.

BLACK
Could be either.

HINKSTON
Captain, I know these houses. It's Grinnell, Iowa.

HENLEY
Green Town, captain!

BLACK looks from the town to him.

BLACK
Henley?

HENLEY
We've miscalculated. Circled back to Earth.

HINKSTON
Why not!?

BLACK cannot believe what he hears.

BLACK
Garbage! (slowly) We've traveled three hundred million miles. We orbited Mars. We've landed!

HINKSTON, rebuked, searches for other explanations.

HINKSTON
Then...what if somehow we...twisted in space. Hit a time warp, been thrown back to...some old town...1930...1910.

BLACK
Time warp! Jesus!

HENLEY
Well, what do we really know about space or time? What?!

CLOSEUP ON BLACK, who touches a BEEPER on his wrist.

BLACK
Lustig, Wells, Larsen, Black here. Stay aboard. Under no circumstances leave the ship!

LARSEN'S VOICE
Larsen, Captain. Check.

They move further into the town.

HINKSTON
Parallel civilizations, captain? Mars and Earth!

BLACK (snorts)
Parallel architecture, houses, trees, lawns?

HINKSTON
Yes, if life started here!

BLACK and HENLEY stop and stare at him.

HINKSTON
Suppose Mars came alive thousands of years ago... sent expeditions to Earth which have been forgotten or lost. That's one way to explain all this! And...Good God!

BLACK (alarmed)
What?!

HINKSTON drops to his knees and bends to touch a TENNIS RACKET.

HINKSTON
It's mine! Mine! (stunned, turns it over) My initials! When I was fifteen! (awed) What the hell's it doing here?

HINKSTON hears the sound of laughter. It sounds as if a summer game of tennis is being played nearby. BLACK and HENLEY hear it as well. Slowly HINKSTON rises to move towards the sounds, then breaks into a run.

BLACK
Hinkston. Hold on!

HENLEY
He doesn't even hear you!

BLACK and HENLEY pursue HINKSTON.

CUT TO: Another street in the town, as BLACK and HENLEY run into shot. HINKSTON is gone. The sound of laughter and games is louder. They halt.

BLACK
My God! They're playing tennis!

HENLEY
Yes—and—no—it can't be.

An OLD MAN waves in the shade of the trees.

GRANDPA
Will? William?

CLOSEUP ON HENLEY.

HENLEY (incredulous)
Grandfather!

The OLD MAN moves from the shade.

GRANDPA
Is that you?

HENLEY, deeply moved, walks toward him.

HENLEY (quietly)
Grandfather.

BLACK (alarmed)
Henley!

BLACK is totally stunned as he watches:

HENLEY is caught in his GRANDFATHER'S arms.

HENLEY (gasping)
Grandpa!

GRANDPA (comforting him)
There, there.

BLACK arrives behind them.

HENLEY (looking up in tears)
Sir, this is my grandfather!

GRANDPA
Yes, sir!!

HENLEY
Grandfather. You died!

GRANDPA
Shhh. It's all right, Will, it's all right.
Come along, boy.

An OLD WOMAN appears on a front porch, wiping her hands on an apron.

GRANDMA (calls)
Will, come on. Everyone's waiting!

HENLEY (stunned)
Grandma!

He runs to the porch.

BLACK, left behind, is frozen with indecision.

Slowly, happily, GRANDMA and HENLEY move upon the porch.

BLACK
Henley!

BLACK is alone in this empty street in this strange town. Its sounds surround him, whispering.

BLACK barks into his cellular phone.

BLACK
Larsen...!

He stops because he hears another sound: a sports CROWD cheering, far off, then near.

He turns, alert to the sound of a radio broadcast baseball game. A VOICE describes a home run!

BLACK stares up. THE VOICE seems to echo from the trees!

BASEBALL COMMENTATOR
...there it goes! A long drive...way up, way back! It looks like...could be...a home run! Black is out there! He's under it!

BLACK swivels to see, running hard down the street, backwards, trying to catch the ball, a YOUNG MAN.

We hear the roar of a vast unseen CROWD as the ball falls neatly into his mitt.

BASEBALL COMMENTATOR
Got it! What a catch!

THE CROWD SOUNDS FADE as THE YOUNG MAN, his back to BLACK, stands happily tossing the ball.

BLACK stares at him, stunned, and gasps:

BLACK
Skip? Skipper?

SKIP turns, smiling almost casually.

SKIP
Hey, Blackie! Welcome home!

BLACK puts his hands to his face to stop the tears. He staggers forward to touch, then hold, SKIP'S arms.

BLACK (quietly)
This can't be. (a beat) Mom? Dad?

SKIP (easily)
They're back at the house.

BLACK
House?

SKIP
Apricot pie cooling on the kitchen window. Lemonade in the icebox. Band concert. Fireworks at nine. You're just in time!

The quiet MUSIC of "BEAUTIFUL OHIO" sounds on a distant piano.

SKIP
Hear that?

BLACK hears and nods his, his eyes brimmed.

SKIP
Race you home?

BLACK (still confused)
Skipper...

BLACK looks around him, still trying to make sense of his senses and emotions.

SKIP (softly)
It's okay!

BLACK (a beat)
All right...sure!

SKIP
Here goes nothing!

SKIP bounds off, laughing.

BLACK shakes his head, follows.

They run through the empty streets. The trees rush over them.

SKIP
C'mon! Chicken!

THE CAMERA CUTS from one to the other.

BLACK (panting)
My God, I—

SKIP
Race you backwards!

SKIP spins into a backwards run.

BLACK does the same, still running.

BLACK
Good God...backwards!

And THE CAMERA follows as, almost exhausted, they round a corner. The MUSIC of "BEAUTIFUL OHIO" is louder now.

CUT TO: We are looking down from the porch of a large white house.

Into shot run SKIP and BLACK.

As they reach the front of the house BLACK catches up with SKIP and grabs him, laughing, as they jolt to a halt. BLACK turns to stare up at the house.

We hear that piano playing near an open window where lace curtains blow out on the summer air.

BLACK, tremendously moved, walks up the porch stairs.

SKIP follows, with pleasure.

BLACK walks like someone underwater. Now SKIP leans ahead to hold the screen door wide.

Like a sleepwalker BLACK steps in.

Inside, we are in a shadowy hall, with windows rimmed with colored glass: strawberry, lemon, grape tints.

BLACK gazes up at the colored glass as if he were in church, then turns to look in at the parlor of the BLACK house. SKIP touches BLACK'S elbow, nods him to move.

Quietly BLACK crosses the parlor and stands behind his MOTHER.

She senses him there, but keeps playing.

BLACK reaches out and gently puts his hands over her eyes.

She smiles as his fingers touch and she is wondrously blinded.

BLACK sinks to his knees, buries his head in her lap, weeps.

The PIANO MUSIC stops. The theme is continued by woodwinds as BLACK'S MOTHER turns from the keyboard to touch his head.

MRS. BLACK
There, there, son.

BLACK (weeping like a child)
I don't understand.

MRS. BLACK
Don't try. It's enough we're together again,
and...weep for joy.

MRS. BLACK rises from the piano, holds out her arms as THE MUSIC surrounds them.

BLACK rises. She takes his hands and causes him to move in a slow circle to the MUSIC.

WE CUT from his face to hers, and back as the MUSIC dies and they stand with their eyes bright with tears. APPLAUSE.

They turn to a window and look out.

Below, on the lawn, applauding: HINKSTON and his relatives, HENLEY and his.

BLACK lifts his hand to wave: QUICK CUT TO:

BLACK, CLOSEUP, outside, beaming as, in the sound of laughter and clinking glasses, THE CAMERA moves back and back to show him at a long picnic spread. As THE CAMERA continues to pull back along the picnic spread, we see that tablecloths are laid on the back lawn under the trees, with HINKSTON on one side, HENLEY on the other, laughing, drinking.

As BLACK surveys it all.

From his POV the whole long sun and leaf dappled spread.

With his MOTHER at the far end.

HINKSTON'S GRANDFATHER lifts his glass.

GRANDFATHER
A toast!

EVERYONE (laughing)
A toast!

BLACK lifts his glass.

BLACK
To Hinkston and his relatives!

ALL
To Hinkston!

BLACK
To Henley and his!

ALL
To Henley!

BLACK
To my mother and father...my grandmother and grandfather...and my brother...and this house that I lived in when I was twelve. How could it be?

HENLEY looks around in awe.

HENLEY
Yes! Grandpa, grandma, you've been dead for twenty years!

GRANDMA (nods)
Twenty five!

THE RELATIVES laugh quietly.

BLACK
And mother...you...?

MRS. BLACK
Ten years.

BLACK
Is this Heaven then?

GRANDMA
No! No!

THE RELATIVES laugh at the notion.

BLACK
Some kind of reincarnation...?

GRANDPA (cutting in)
It's a place where we have a second chance. Nobody told us why.

CLOSEUP ON GRANDMA.

GRANDMA
Then nobody told why we were on that other Earth. The one you just came from.

GRANDPA
Finish the toast, boy...finish the toast!

Everyone murmurs agreement.

BLACK (a beat, controlling himself)
To wherever this is, in whatever time or place for whatever reason. To each and to all.

ALL
To each and to all.

All drink.

GRANDMA
Well said!

BLACK starts to sit, but freezes at the sound of a MARCHING BAND.

BLACK stares out across the lawn.

A small BRASS BAND marches down the street. Behind it are A CROWD of TOWNSPEOPLE, many with arms linked to six of BLACK'S CREW. Only LARSEN seems separate from the joyful march.

BLACK stares in disbelief.

BLACK
I gave orders! They—

THE BAND pulls up in front of the house as BLACK comes out to meet them.

CLOSEUP on LARSEN, as he arrives, frowning.

LARSEN
Captain!

BLACK
For God's sake—

LARSEN
Sir! All these men have quit their stations. I couldn't stop them!

BLACK
I see that!

LARSEN
Our ship! Shouldn't you order them back!?

BLACK shakes his head, eyes shut.

BLACK
Yes. No. My God, I don't know!

LARSEN (dumbfounded)
Sir!

BLACK'S MOTHER moves forward with a glass of wine.

MRS. BLACK
Mr. Larsen? Here!

LARSEN stares at it, as does BLACK.

GRANDPA laughs, holds out another glass.

GRANDPA
Hell! Lemonade then?

Everyone murmurs for him to accept. But LARSEN backs off, nervously.

LARSEN
Captain. Request permission to return to ship.

THE TOWNSPEOPLE laugh at this.

LARSEN
Someone must stand guard!

BLACK
Larsen...

LARSEN looks around at the "FAMILY."

LARSEN
Captain? (a beat) Dismissed?

BLACK (at last, nods)
Dismissed.

LARSEN half-runs down the street.

Behind BLACK his MOTHER speaks.

MRS. BLACK
Such a nice young man. Why didn't he stay?

BLACK broods watching LARSEN go.

BLACK
He has no one here. Myself, the others, we've all found family and friends, but Larsen's an orphan. So no one's here to greet him. No...

BLACK stops himself, suddenly uneasy.

GRANDPA, seeing this, cuts in.

GRANDPA
Cigars, gentlemen!

GRANDMA
Lemonade, ladies!

MRS. BLACK
Front porch everyone!

EVERYONE
Front porch!

Everyone but BLACK'S MOTHER and BLACK hurry up to the porch.

In the sudden stillness BLACK'S MOTHER gazes at BLACK.

MRS. BLACK.
Son...you all right?

BLACK (a beat)
All right.

Suppressing a chill, he takes her hand. BANG!

FIREWORKS burst in the sky!

CUT TO the main street, the CROWD looking up.

More FIREWORKS, and BLACK'S CREW, gazing at the bright Heavens as THE BAND blares.

THE MAYOR
As Mayor of this town I welcome these—

A GREAT EXPLOSION shuts him off.

GRANDPA
The fireworks say it <u>better</u>!

Everyone laughs and stares.

CAPTAIN BLACK and his MOTHER gaze happily up into the darkness, the bright flare of the FIREWORKS on their faces.

A final huge blossom of flame dies. CUT TO:

The parlor of the BLACK home, night, as BLACK'S MOTHER cranks a phonograph and places the needle. We hear a faint scratchy version of "BEAUTIFUL OHIO".

BLACK, at the window, watches THE CROWD departing into the various houses.

BLACK
I'll never forget tonight. You, Skip, everyone. It's like heaven...

His MOTHER comes up behind him.

MRS. BLACK
I bet you're exhausted.

BLACK
It's been a long night, a long journey. I need <u>time</u>!

MRS. BLACK
Time to sleep?

BLACK
Time to think!

MRS. BLACK (amicably nodding)
And then to sleep.

SKIP comes down the hall stairs.

SKIP
Your old bed's ready, Blackie. Let's get this guy some shut-eye, Mom!

BLACK (wearily)
Yeah...shut-eye.

His MOTHER hugs and kisses him.

MRS. BLACK
Good night, son. Sleep well!

BLACK lets SKIP go ahead of him, upstairs.

MOTHER smiles after them. The "BEAUTIFUL OHIO" record fades.

Around town, doors shut, a last few fireworks die.

BLACK enters the upstairs bedroom and stares with happy disbelief.

SKIP points around at pennants, pictures, toys.

SKIP
How about this!?

BLACK looks at: A big brass bed.

BLACK
Skip! This is our old bedroom!

SKIP
Kee-rect!

BLACK touches something.

BLACK
My old football helmet! (surveys the walls) My pennants. My star charts from high school astronomy. My Air Force Academy diploma!

SKIP
Yep!

BLACK (incredulous)
But...these things all burned. Our house caught fire! Everything went up in flames. Skip...you were burned...

BLACK'S eyes are blurred and wet.

SKIP
They're all here Blackie. Touch them. I'm here. I'm real. Touch me.

Gently, SKIP takes BLACK'S hand to place it on his chest.

SKIP (a beat)
Don't spoil it. Here!

He tosses a football helmet. BLACK'S catches it.

SKIP
See if it fits that big head.

Slowly BLACK puts it on.

SKIP
Catch!

SKIP tosses a football. BLACK catches it, numbly. They pass it three times, then SKIP winks at BLACK as he strips.

SKIP
Sleep?
BLACK removes the helmet.

SKIP, down to his shorts, climbs in bed.

BLACK sits on the edge of the bed. Somewhere a lost locomotive wails softly as BLACK broods.

Behind him, in bed, his BROTHER speaks.

SKIP
Blackie?

BLACK (thinking)
In a minute.

BLACK listens to the quiet night sounds; Crickets, birds, the wind.

SKIP
Blackie. Something wrong?

SKIP half lifts his head from the pillow, watching BLACK.

SKIP
Come on…

BLACK
I was just thinking.

SKIP (laughs quietly)
Thinking's bad for you.

BLACK has found a catcher's mitt and baseball nearby and tosses the ball into the mitt as he wonders.

BLACK
What if…

SKIP
What if?

BLACK
What if we landed on Mars, only…

SKIP
Only?

BLACK (tosses the ball)
…only this small Illinois town is not an Illinois town.

Outside in the night, people pass, laughing softly.

BLACK
And these people are not family. Not friends.

SKIP
Not—?

BLACK
What if...the Martians knew that we were landing? How would they prepare themselves for our...invasion?

SKIP
How?

BLACK
Telepathy. (a beat) Suppose the Martians could "borrow" our thoughts as we landed, and by telepathy and hypnosis...My God! They could pretend to be our aunts, uncles, mothers and fathers.

SKIP lifts himself up on one elbow, quietly.

SKIP
That means all the people in this town...

CLOSEUP on BLACK as he stops tossing the ball into the mitt.

BLACK
...are Martians disguised as Earthmen? (a beat) Then my mother...

From his pillow, SKIP adds:

SKIP
...is not our mother

CLOSEUP:

BLACK (more stunned)
And my grandparents are not my grandparents.

SKIP (easily)
Well, then, what about me, Blackie?

BLACK turns to look across the bed.

BLACK
You're...not my brother.

SKIP sits up, claws the air.

SKIP
Right! I'm a beast. A monster who'll kill you in your sleep. (shuts his eyes, snorts) Blackie! Lie down!

SKIP turns off the lamp.

BLACK moves to sit on the other side of the bed. Far away we hear the piano music again, two bars which fade.

BLACK looks down at SKIP, who smiles in his half-sleep.

BLACK turns. THE CAMERA moves with him towards the door. Suddenly:

SKIP
Blackie. Where you going?

CLOSEUP:

BLACK
Thirsty. Drink of water.

From BLACK'S perspective, we look back towards the bed. The dark silhouette of SKIP rises there.

SKIP
But you're not thirsty.

BLACK
I am.

CLOSEUP on SKIP'S SILHOUETTE as he sits straight up.

SKIP (softly)
No!

Very big CLOSEUP on SKIP'S eyes.

Back to BLACK as he hears:

SKIP (quietly)
You're not thirsty!

CLOSEUP on BLACK, panicked, he claws the air.

CLOSEUP: his fingers seize the doorknob!

Instantly, a hand grabs BLACK'S shoulder.

Behind him, unseen, SKIP whispers:

SKIP
...thirsty...?

BLACK is yanked into darkness.

The door SLAMS!

CUT TO: The parlor, where the phonograph record's steel needle hisses the last notes of "BEAUTIFUL OHIO." Then we hear: Hiss...hiss...hiss...!

CUT TO a churchyard, dawn, the brass band there plays the same last six notes of "BEAUTIFUL OHIO" as THE CAMERA pulls back to reveal:

BLACK'S RELATIVES and FRIENDS are looking into some open graves. All are in dark mourning clothes.

GRANDFATHER
We are gathered here to honor these newly...

THE MOURNERS
...newly...

THE MAYOR
...dead. Hinkston, Henley, Captain John Black.
THE MOURNERS (echoing)
...Black...

THE MAYOR
Ashes to ashes...

THE MOURNERS
Dust to dust...

A wind blows through the churchyard, stirring dust.

Which blows across their faces, beginning to erode and change their identities. But before it does:

We pull up and away, high above the landscape, so the churchyard, the people, the town, are obscured in a dust storm, in which we hear "BEAUTIFUL OHIO" as the merest whisper of sound.

Full in the sky, red MARS, waiting.

DISSOLVE IN, THE CAMERA pulls back from CAPTAIN WILDER, now listening to the MUSIC.

The MUSIC is, of course, the last note, almost a whisper, of "BEAUTIFUL OHIO" fading in the wind.

WILDER, head bent, will not look at SPENDER. SPENDER listens, and at last says:

SPENDER
...Martians 18...Earthmen zero...

WILDER broods.

WILDER
There <u>are</u> no Martians.

SPENDER
And now there are no <u>Earthmen</u>.

WILDER straightens up.

WILDER
There's <u>us</u>.

SPENDER
Us? And <u>who</u> are <u>we</u>?

WILDER
Custer at Little Big Horn? Cortez and Montezuma?
Choose <u>one</u>?

SPENDER (shakes his head)
I'm caught between. Wait.

He moves to a console, stabs a button. We hear a tape whistle on its spindles. He stabs two more buttons. Sound echoes. We hear the same melancholy wind and the faintest touch of the HARP-BOOK and 'DRINK TO ME ONLY WITH THINE EYES.'

SPENDER stabs the button. The tape spins, stops. We hear, "Allen here. Mars Two down and secured..."

Another button pushed, more tape spun and: BLACK'S VOICE, "Stay on board. Repeat, do not disembark." And a few notes, blown away in the wind, of the town band remembering "OHIO."

SPENDER shuts it off.
WILDER stares at the console, and then at SPENDER.

WILDER
So we change our landing coordinates?

SPENDER
Don't you think they deserve being saved at last. Or buried?

WILDER considers and touches the control desk at his elbow.

WILDER (to the control microphone)
Now hear this!

Around the interior of the ship, the various CREW MEMBERS listen-up.

WILDER looks at SPENDER.

SPENDER, as if providing the coordinates, speaks.

SPENDER
Just say: The Alamo.
WILDER raises his eyebrows, questioning.

SPENDER gives the answer.

SPENDER
We lost <u>there</u>, too.

INSTANT CUT TO: The retro-rockets firing down!

MARS, the great bloody crimson disc, rising to fill the screen!

The Martian dust beneath the rocket-blast, taking fire!

The SPACECRAFT DOOR hisses wide. EXTERIOR.

INTERIOR, looking out, we come to focus on, we see:

At a distance, low crystal-pillared dwellings. One of them, familiar, the place in the hills where we first saw YLL AND YLLA.

The port slams shut behind the departing ASTRONAUTS.
CUT TO: The LINE OF MEN advancing across the shore of the dead sea bottom.

WILDER in the center, SPENDER behind him, and, to one side, PARKHILL, CHEROKEE, HINKSTON and LUSTIG shadowed by the late hour of the day.

The wind blows across the vast mosaic porch fronting YLLA'S home.

THE CAMERA CUTS to see WILDER and his MEN at the edge of the mosaics.

Leaves blow across the mosaic parquetry.

WILDER stares at them, as do his men.

SPENDER glances around.

SPENDER
Captain, there are no trees here.

They all look around.

HATHAWAY
Then where in hell did all these <u>leaves</u> come from?

WILDER nods at something.

SPENDER and the others follow his gaze.

From doorways and windows, the leaves are blowing outward, softly, quietly.

SPENDER'S face is shadowed by a premonition.

The leaves rustle across their boots.

WILDER nods them on.

They move in a line across the empty porch.

And reach a doorway where the wind blows out around their faces with a faint pollen of leaves. We can see clearly now that this was YLLA'S place.

WILDER and SPENDER glance at each other. SPENDER nods WILDER to enter. WILDER does so.

THE CAMERA MOVES with WILDER and SPENDER through the living quarters of the house to reach another doorway.

They move inward and see:

A bed with a vague outline of a shape under a silken coverlet that flutters in the wind.

WILDER'S eyes widen. He takes an impulsive step forward.

CLOSER now, we see a human figure from which the 'leaves' are sifting away. The merest closeup of a face, not yet gone to dust, still beautiful.

WILDER gasps.

CLOSEUP: YLLA, vanishing in particles of dust.

SPENDER stares, then reaches to pick up one of the "autumn leaves."

He turns it in his fingers and at last says:

SPENDER
Hathaway?

HATHAWAY, behind them, with a medical computer, moves up.
SPENDER hands him the strange leaflet.

HATHAWAY looks to THE CAPTAIN.

Who nods.

HATHAWAY inserts the leaflet under an electronic glass to faint hums of the equipment.

And WILDER and SPENDER can only stare at:

The bed with the strange beauty of YLLA there, soon to be lost in the night.

HATHAWAY touches a tab. The computer glows. Numbers and letters dissolve in on the small screen.

HATHAWAY watches, as does SPENDER and WILDER.

A final number appears and then a medical menu.
HATHAWAY'S eyes widen.

SPENDER reacts the same way, but even more so.

WILDER looks at both of them and waits.

HATHAWAY repeats the Latin phrase on the dial, quietly, in disbelief.

HATHAWAY
My God! What a joke!

It is SPENDER who translates.

SPENDER (a bare whisper)
...chicken pox...or a variation.

WILDER looks from him to the bed where the wind passes over YLLA'S face, her arms, her hands.

WILDER
Impossible. On Earth—

HATHAWAY
Children's disease, mostly. No deaths in
half a century! But here—

SPENDER (whispers)
No immunization...no vaccine...

WILDER still can't believe, snatches up a few more "leaves." HATHAWAY shakes his head, puts them in the machine anyway.

HATHAWAY
No use, Captain.

The numbers come up, and then the Latin phrase.

HATHAWAY
Same results.

SPENDER kicks the machine aside and exits quickly.

HATHAWAY picks up the machine which hums as he leaves.

WILDER pulls the silk coverlet over YLLA'S face.

Outside in the night they all stare at the windows, the doorways where the terrible drifts sift out on the air.

SPENDER glares around, stunned.

WILDER stares down at his feet where the awful flaking dust blows.

WILDER
My God, did our landings do this!?

SPENDER gives the cold answer.

SPENDER
Divide and conquer, Captain. Welcome to the New World.

HATHAWAY heads out across the mosaic porch, abandoning his computer.

WILDER bends to carry it.

CLOSEUP: Its terrible medical sums glow.

WILDER sees that SPENDER has not moved.

WILDER
Spender?!

SPENDER listens to the wind.

SPENDER
In a moment, Captain.

WILDER turns and, with HATHAWAY, moves swiftly off from the scene of quiet death. Now the plaza is empty save for SPENDER and the dark drifts, whispering.

Below, a campfire is started.

SPENDER moves across the porch to another door.

And enters a library where, on golden racks we see hundreds of HARP-BOOKS that vibrate in the wind.

SPENDER touches one. It sings quietly of time and eternity. He looks out and down at:

The campfire below, where THE MEN are gathered. We hear their voices.

SPENDER turns to the HARPBOOKS.

SPENDER
Anyone here?

The HARPBOOKS thrum their delicate golden threads.

THE BOOKS (echoing)
...here...

SPENDER shakes his head with the quiet wonder of this place.

SPENDER
...yes.

THE HARPBOOKS echo, trembling.

THE BOOKS
...yes...

Again he scans the campfire far away and then gazes at the landscape.
We see the hills, the gentle mountains, the dead seas, the empty canals in the soft light of the Martian moons.

SPENDER'S face colors with remembrance.

SPENDER
Byron...was it Lord Byron? Yes.
Yes...how did it go?

(recites quietly)
"So we'll go no more aroving
So late into the night,
Though the heart be still as loving
And the moon be still as bright."

The HARPBOOKS, nearby, murmur.

THE BOOKS
...loving...night...bright.

SPENDER nods. He has company.

SPENDER
"For the sword outwears it sheath
And the soul wears out the breast
And the heart must pause to breathe
And love itself must rest..."

THE HARPBOOKS echo.

THE BOOKS
...rest...

The hills are listening. The sky is waiting. The land is silent.

SPENDER
"Though the night was made for loving
And the day returns too soon
Yet we'll go no more aroving
By the light of the moon..."

THE BOOKS (fading)
...aroving...light...of the moon.

SPENDER shuts his eyes and reaches blindly to touch, surprised:
A MASK hanging near the books. He turns and holds it up to look:

Through the eye-slits.

We see what he sees, the campfire, THE MEN, and their laughter.

SPENDER moves among the HARPBOOKS which sound quietly as he passes, "...no more aroving..." "light...moon."

He moves down the hill.

THE CAMERA, SPENDER'S POV, moves toward the campfire at the edge of the canal. As THE CAMERA draws nearer we can see that most of THE CREW has headed back to the SPACESHIP to bring out supplies. Only BIGGS remains, for the moment, by the small fire and as we draw closer we can see that he is holding up and drinking from a can of beer and talking to himself.

BIGGS (far off)
Biggs, old boy. You did it. Yes, sir. No two ways about it. Did it. You, Biggs, you!

He eyes the canal nearby and turns to it, even as we hear footsteps and from SPENDER'S POV watch BIGGS.

BIGGS
Wonder what they called this canal. What the hey, let's give it a new name. What—?

CLOSEUP now on BIGGS.

BIGGS
Who's there?

REVERSE ANGLE, SPENDER, THE MASK on his face, his eyes watchful.

BIGGS
That you, Spender? It is you, right? What you got there?

CLOSEUP of THE MASK in SPENDER'S hand.

BIGGS laughs easily.

BIGGS
You're just in time. Going to re-name this canal. Going to re-name everything, the next year. Wilder foothills, there. Hinkston city. Spender mountains! Right?

SPENDER cuts him off.

SPENDER
I've found a Martian.

BIGGS hasn't quite heard.

BIGGS
What?

SPENDER responds.

SPENDER
The Martian came to me there...and said, give me your clothes...I gave them. Give me your gun. I gave that. And now the Martian is here.

He lifts THE MASK to his face.

BIGGS is amused.

BIGGS
Careful. You might not be able to get it off!

SPENDER touches THE MASK and we get the faintest notion that maybe it won't come off.

BIGGS
See? Well, what the hell, watch. I hearby Christen this canal—

BIGGS pours his beer into the canal.

BIGGS
—Biggs canal. Don't that have a ring?

CLOSEUP OF THE MASK and SPENDER'S eyes.

CLOSEUP of his right hand unholstering his sidearm.
BIGGS senses this but goes on:

BIGGS
Biggs!

SPENDER fires.

The beer can falls into darkness.

SPENDER backs off and disappears.

THE CREW comes running.

BIGGS lies by the fire, silent, as WILDER arrives with PARKHILL and the others and looks up into the hills.

WILDER
Spender...

PARKHILL
How do you know?

WILDER
I know.

He sees the beer can in the canal.

WILDER
Get that out of there.

PARKHILL
It's only...

WILDER (cuts him off)
Get it out!

PARKHILL shrugs and bends down to retrieve the can. He holds it up in the light.

PARKHILL
What do I do with it?

At this moment there is a sharp CRACK. The beer can, targeted and shot, flies out of his fingers, up in the air, to land by BIGGS.

PARKHILL stares at it, then up in the hills.

WILDER
Get the others.

HATHAWAY
We're here, Captain.

THE MEN move into the light. There is another CRACK. HATHAWAY, struck in the chest, falls.

PARKHILL
My God, he'll kill us all!

WILDER
Move. Sidearms. Rifles. Go!

He waves them out of the light, runs.

There is another CRACK. A shot lands near PARKHILL. This makes them all jump, spin about, vanish in darkness, as THE CAMERA moves in on, CLOSEUP, the beer can and BIGGS lying quietly by the fire. CUT TO:

SPENDER, on top of a rise one hundred yards back, THE MASK on his face. He backs off into darkness. CUT TO:

THE CREW assembled outside the SPACECRAFT, sidearms in place. Only PARKHILL has a rifle.

PARKHILL
Your orders, Captain?

WILDER
Stop him. If he stops us, there may be no more expeditions to Mars. Four trips, four failures? Back home they'll give up. So, find Spender.

PARKHILL
Kill him!

PARKHILL hefts the RIFLE. WILDER takes it.

PARKHILL
Hey?!
WILDER hands him a PISTOL.

WILDER
Not that, this. Wound, do not kill.

There is a sharp CRACK. A bullet ricochets off the rocks. THE MEN duck down.

PARKHILL
Son of a bitch!

Another CRACK.

CHEROKEE
My God, if he picks us off, he'll own the whole damn planet!

WILDER considers this, ironically, in the shadows, crouched low.

WILDER
Right. And any new expedition he can welcome, they're dead.

PARKHILL
He can't do that!

WILDER
He's doing it. Go!

Another CRACK. THE MEN vanish in darkness.

On the hill, the shape of SPENDER, in his MASK.

In a series of QUICK SHOTS, MONTAGE, we see THE MEN run, duck, fire.

As does SPENDER, above.

Another shot, and another. DRISCOLL leaps aside but:

PARKHILL is struck in the upper arm. He grabs the wound.

PARKHILL
Bastard!

THE MEN run, duck, shoot, as does SPENDER.

As PARKHILL binds up his wound...

Above, SPENDER appears, arms in the air, weaponless.

PARKHILL (aims)
Son of a bitch wants to talk.

WILDER
No! I'm going up.

He tosses his rifle to DRISCOLL.

WILDER
Cover me.

PARKHILL (aiming again)
Blow his damn brains out!

WILDER
Cover me!

He stares at PARKHILL. PARKHILL lowers his weapon.

WILDER starts up the hill.

PARKHILL itches his trigger but holds fire.

As does DRISCOLL and the others.

WILDER moves up the hill.

SPENDER waits.

WILDER reaches the top of the rise where SPENDER waits for him near the porch and pillars of YLLA'S home.

SPENDER
Captain.

WILDER (quietly)
Spender...

SPENDER (looking around)
Now that you're here, stay.

WILDER
Why?

SPENDER
It's an incredible place, Captain. The library...

WILDER glances in at the HARPBOOKS which vibrate softly.

SPENDER
The architecture...the arts...all of it...can be yours.

WILDER (shakes his head)
No, it belongs to everyone. Come back down.

SPENDER
To be shot. No thanks.

WILDER
Parkhill says you'll kill us one by one and then when the next expedition arrives, kill them.

SPENDER looks around at the hills and sky and then back at WILDER.

SPENDER
Yes, but I don't mean to kill—

SPENDER examines his weapon with mixed feelings.

SPENDER
It's just...I represent the entire Martian civilization.

WILDER glances at the dead seas and then in at the library.

WILDER
Did they tell you that!

SPENDER
Right now, yes. Listen!

WILDER listens, shakes his head.

WILDER
Nothing.

SPENDER
Yes, something! When I pick all the others off, you'll be last. I'll let you live! Listen...

The sound of the library stirs its HARPS.

SPENDER
Then you'll hear!

WILDER backs off.

SPENDER
Must I kill you, too?!

WILDER responds.

WILDER
You won't do that.

SPENDER is curious. WILDER finishes.

WILDER
Because I'm the other Spender.

SPENDER muses on this.

SPENDER
The good Spender? As against the bad?

WILDER nods.

SPENDER
Give me another reason why I should let you live?

WILDER glances back down the hill and then up into the sky and around.

WILDER
The future depends on us. We'll stay on Mars a few years and then head for Alpha Centauri. If we make it, the whole human race lives forever.

SPENDER
Does mankind deserve to live forever?

WILDER
Yes.

SPENDER
With all its boils, pimples, murders, rapes, wars?

WILDER
I think so.

SPENDER
Why?

WILDER
What's the use of a Universe not seen?
Why were we born on Earth? To see it all.
To witness and celebrate.

SPENDER
And you believe that?

SPENDER looks into WILDER'S face.

We look at WILDER'S face. He believes. He truly believes.

SPENDER sees this and must avert his gaze.

SPENDER
Captain...? (quietly) God, oh, God!

WILDER waits.

SPENDER (continues)
If you should win, I lose, there's a Martian tomb down there.

WILDER looks.

We see the tomb entrance with Martian heiroglyphs above the sill.

SPENDER
Put me there.

WILDER nods and walks swiftly away.

SPENDER watches, his rifle half-raised.

WILDER walks down and down the hill.

Watching, SPENDER'S face changes and—

His hand lets the rifle drop.

It hits the ground by his boots. CUT TO:

WILDER arriving by DRISCOLL and PARKHILL and the others.

PARKHILL
Well, do we kill the bastard?

DRISCOLL gasps, surprised.

DRISCOLL
Hey!

Above, we can see SPENDER, weaponless.

DRISCOLL
My God, he's not moving!

PARKHILL (aims)
Whatta target! Stay there! Yeah...

WILDER
Parkhill...

PARKHILL turns, reluctantly.

PARKHILL
In the head, Captain. All yours.

WILDER (numbly)
Mine?

All THE MEN have half-risen, seeing:

Above on the hill, SPENDER waits.

WILDER watches him for a long moment, raises his rifle.

WILDER (under his breath)
Don't make me do it...

PARKHILL
He's asking for it, Captain.

DRISCOLL
Why?

WILDER sights the rifle, whispers frantically.

WILDER
Spender!...move.

On the hill, SPENDER is motionless.

WILDER shuts his eyes, breathes a prayer, opens his eyes, fires.

The sound of the shot echoes off the stone cliffs and hills.

Causing the HARPBOOKS in the library to chime and bell softly.

QUICK SHOT of the hill-top, empty. SPENDER is gone! CUT TO:

The tomb door flung wide as:

THE MEN carry SPENDER'S BODY in to place it on a flat sarcophagus lid.

WILDER moves forward and puts:

THE GOLDEN MASK by SPENDER'S HEAD.

WILDER
He must be remembered.

DRISCOLL, in the shadows, responds.

DRISCOLL
How could we forget?

Outside, PARKHILL snorts with contempt and fires at one of the crystal pillars.

The pillar cracks and falls. CUT TO:

WILDER striking PARKHILL full on.

The rifle falls, strikes. CUT TO:

The tomb door slams SHUT!

INSTANT CUT TO: Space, more ROCKETS firing toward MARS.

And as the ROCKETS move down and land and the ports open and THE MEN move out, and THE WOMEN move out with them, we hear WILDER'S VOICE. Under which we hear his COMPUTER-TYPEWRITER VOICE-WRITER working and perhaps echoing his words:

WILDER
And at last the men of Earth came to Mars. They came to run away from something or find something, dig something up or bury something...and the first men were few and were called The Lonelies, The Lonely Ones.

And with WILDER'S speech we see more INTERCUTS, more MONTAGES of arriving ROCKETS and an increasing multiplicity of men.

WILDER
And at last, thank God, the women to set the whole place straight.

We see more WOMEN, of all types and sizes, coming from THE SHIPS, confronting the tin-siding frontier Martian encampments.

At which point behind WILDER, at his computer or speaking into his VOICEWRITER, the door opens and DRISCOLL steps in, breathing with difficulty.

WILDER
Driscoll, well, well, come in.

DRISCOLL
Just barely. My God, the atmosphere is thin.

WILDER (takes a deep breath)
True. Indeed.

DRISCOLL
What are you up to?

WILDER (nods to his computer screen)
Trying to be a novelist or write a diary. How does this sound?

He taps a button. His own voice echoes from the machine.

WILDER'S VOICE
The rockets came like locusts swarming the sky. Their engines fired the dead seas of Mars, turned rock to lava, melted sand and lica into green glass that lay like shattered mirrors reflecting the invasion...

During this we see, on the COMPUTER SCREEN, similar images. WILDER, listening to himself, nods to DRISCOLL.

WILDER
How do you like it so far?

DRISCOLL (hesitantly, gasping)
A bit rich, isn't it?

WILDER
You think so?

He touches a tab. His own voice continues.

WILDER'S VOICE
And the new men from an old world brought bits and pieces of Earth with them, so as not to be homesick, so as not to be lonely...

We see images of vases, chairs, lamps, and one good sized window with purple/rose/lemon/yellow colored glass in a frame around it.

WILDER stops.

WILDER
Yes, yes, a bit rich.

He hits a tab and the images vanish, THE VOICE runs down and stops.

DRISCOLL is gasping.

WILDER
You are having a time trying to breathe, Driscoll, why don't you—

DRISCOLL
Go back to Earth. No, sir. I won't be changed by Mars, by God. I'll change it. Here.

He holds out his open palm. On it, a good handfull of SEEDS.

WILDER
Is that what I think it is?

DRISCOLL
Seeds for grass, sir. Seeds for trees, branches, green leafs!

WILDER (with patient kindness)
It doesn't rain on Mars, Driscoll.

DRISCOLL looks out at the sky where there is the faintest ambiance of cloud formation.

DRISCOLL
I'll make it rain.

WILDER looks from DRISCOLL'S face to the sky.

WILDER
Seed the ground and then—seed the sky?

DRISCOLL
Permission granted?

WILDER reaches to close DRISCOLL'S hands in a gentle fist over the SEEDS.

WILDER
Yes. (a beat) But it won't work!
INSTANT CUT: A SUPERSONIC JET blazing the Martian sky.

As DRISCOLL jettisons the chemical stuffs to 'seed' the clouds.
The JET streaks across our sight three times, dropping its chemistries. CUT TO:

DRISCOLL, bent, digging, planting, looks up at the sky.

Nothing. A few more clouds, perhaps. Nothing else.

DRISCOLL looks over to one side.

WILDER is there, watching, an umbrella in one hand, which he glances at with humor.

DRISCOLL nods and bends back to planting.

When suddenly someone's boots are nearby. He glances up.

WILDER is there, with admiration. He smiles, holds out his hand.

DRISCOLL pours SEEDS into that open palm.

The JET streaks across the sky a final time.

DRISCOLL watches, sweating.

As does WILDER, who starts to turn away when:

Something strikes his face. He stops.

DRISCOLL, bent down, his hands in the soil, also freezes, rises, looks up. Something strikes his face.

He reaches up. As does WILDER. At the same moment, their forefingers find: wetness. A few more drops fall.

They lift their gaze as there is a FLASH OF LIGHTNING, SOFT THUNDER.

DRISCOLL
Glory hallelujah.

WILDER (amazed)
You can say that again.

DRISCOLL
Glory hallelujah!

It really begins to come down now and they stand there until WILDER thinks to snap open the umbrella. He holds it out.

WILDER
Driscoll, my God, don't you know enough to come in out of the rain?!

DRISCOLL lifts his face up, eyes shut.

DRISCOLL
No, sir. It's my rain. Mine!

The RAIN really comes down. THE CAMERA pulls up away from DRISCOLL'S face, up into the air so he stands below, exposed, arms out, mouth open. Nearby, WILDER, laughing, closes the umbrella and does likewise. LIGHTNING. THUNDER.

CUT TO THUNDER in space as THE ROCKETS roar down.

And the trees, on MARS, sprout up, leafing, branching to meet them.

SWIFT INTERCUT SHOTS: MONTAGE of the SPACECRAFT hurtling down, the trees growing, lifting, branching up.

And the SPACECRAFT land, one, two, three, four, five, six, as:

The trees open out, two, four, six, eight, and break forth—blossoms!

INTERCUT with more MONTAGE shots of SPACECRAFT flying in over MARS, COMPUTERS logging in the facts:

NUMBER OF SPACECRAFT ARRIVED: TWENTY-TWO

NUMBER OF SPACECRAFT ENROUTE: THIRTY-TWO

MARS COLONY POPULATION: TWO HUNDRED TWENTY
FIVE HUNDRED SEVENTY
ONE THOUSAND!

NUMBER OF NEW TOWNS: NINE
TWELVE
TWENTY-ONE

The orchards and forests growing up.

And the towns being built mostly from metal sidings, spider-like braces, and plastic, for starters.

We hear THE COMPUTER working and hear WILDER'S VOICE.

WILDER'S VOICE
And with the grass and trees and air to breathe, the towns grew like mushrooms and more people from Earth came to conquer Mars...

We see images of grass, trees, leaves, and a wind blowing in the trees, and ROCKETS firing down on the computer screen, as WILDER says all this.

WILDER'S VOICE
And the Martians, I wondered. Were there any left alive? And where were they? I went to see...

We see A JEEP moving away from the settlement towns and ZOOM IN on it to find WILDER at the wheel...

Driving up into the foothills and off into desolation.

As he takes a fork up yet more shadowed hills.

Sees something ahead by the road.

And pulls in, LONG SHOT, to a very small GAS STATION indeed, the merest leanto shelter with a smallish half-tent behind as residence, and a single robot-like gas-fuel pump out front under a primitive sign designating what this forlorn place is all about.

WILDER pulls up before this and applies the brakes and looks at:

An OLD MAN standing by the pump as if waiting for him. He nods.

WILDER glances back down the road then up ahead.

WILDER
Where are all your customers, pop?

THE OLD MAN is secure in his philosophical reply.

THE OLD MAN
They'll be along. Well?

WILDER
Fill 'er up.

THE OLD MAN moves with the pump-hose. WILDER watches him.

WILDER
Don't you get lonely out here?

THE OLD MAN (at work)
Nope! I came to Mars to get away.

WILDER
And be the first colonial to be buried up here?

THE OLD MAN nods, works.

THE OLD MAN
You got it! And lookit Mars while I'm waiting to be buried. Different weather. Different flowers. Different rain. Hell, just open your eyes, and you're entertained.

He checks the gas pump, pulls the pump-hose out, moves to hook it on the pump, still talking, looking around at the hills.

THE OLD MAN
Everything's crazy up here. Even Time. My clock, my watch, runs funny, does yours? Sometimes I feel I'm the only living soul on the planet.

WILDER nods, entertained. THE OLD MAN talks, wipes his hands.

THE OLD MAN
Wake up thinking I'm eight, nine years old. Mars does that, right? Makes me remember a Christmas when I was twelve. A tube you held up to the light and stared through it at all kinds of glass bits, all colors, and marbles, broken church windows, eh? A kaleidoscope. That's Mars. I'll never stop looking. And you?

WILDER laughs quietly.

WILDER
I'm on my way to Christen a new town ahead. Which road's best?

They both look at the roads moving off into shadows and dust.

THE OLD MAN
That road, a thousand years old. Martians built it way back. That other road, two thousand years! Don't take it.

WILDER
Why?

THE OLD MAN
You might meet something you don't want to meet.

WILDER (a beat)
Martians?

THE OLD MAN stares at the road, nods.

WILDER (almost eagerly)
There are still a few left, then!

THE OLD MAN
Yes. No. Be careful.

WILDER
Alive!

WILDER puts THE JEEP in gear, swiftly, staring at the road.

THE OLD MAN
That'll be three bucks, fifty.

WILDER (shells out, doesn't wait for change)
Alive!

He drives away at high speed. THE OLD MAN yells after him.

THE OLD MAN
Watch out!

CUT TO:

NIGHT. The old road through the hills. Silence. The wind blowing mist across the road, then we hear a motor, and see a dim flash of light.

THE CAMERA SWIVELS in the opposite direction and we see a faint motion, some other strange object moving there, with a dim humming insect sound.

THE CAMERA REVERSES and we see, coming over a rise, WILDER'S VEHICLE.

REVERSE CAMERA again as the ALIEN VEHICLE glides out of the night mists; an ARACHNID SHAPE that moves on eight spidery legs. A HUMAN guides the vehicle with motions of its thin hands, and on its face is a GOLDEN MASK, like a second skin.

WILDER slows his JEEP.

The spidery vehicle also slows.

CLOSEUP we see its DRIVER. THE MARTIAN, YLL, for that is who it is, leans forward, curious.

As does WILDER.

Both stop some twenty feet from each other.

CLOSEUP, WILDER curse-whispers to himself.

YLL in the other traveler whispers:

YLL
...ll...mmm...mmm...

YLL occupies a machine which is like a jade-green insect, a praying mantis. Its six legs touch the ancient highway with a sound of rain.

WILDER raises his hands to show they are empty of weapons.

YLL raises his hands which are also empty.

WILDER speaks first.

WILDER
Hello!

YLL replies in his own language.

YLL
...ll...mm...oo...

And then YLL extends his hand as if to cross the distance..

WILDER feels his head touched, but no hand touches it.

QUICK CLOSEUPS, back and forth. YLL does not move his lips.

YLL
There! That is better.

WILDER
My God, how—?

YLL touches his brow, points to WILDER'S head. WILDER feels the ghost-fingers touch his brow. He nods understanding.

WILDER climbs out of his vehicle.

YLL does the same, calmly.

They approach each other slowly, but with no apprehension.

When they have arrived a few feet from one another, WILDER moves his arm out to shake hands.

Seeing this, YLL moves his arm.

Their hands, touching, move through each other's flesh as if it did not exist.

They pull back, startled. They look at each other's hands and then at one another.

YLL speaks first.

YLL
You do not exist!

WILDER responds, examining YLL.

YLL, against the landscape, is almost a spectral shape.

CLOSEUP, starlight can be seen faintly glimmering through his head.
WILDER gasps.

WILDER
No, you!

YLL narrows his eyes.

For WILDER, to him, seems almost a phantom.

YLL accepts this quietly.

YLL
A ghost, a phantom, no. (a beat)
Perhaps neither of us exists!

WILDER
Impossible!

YLL examines the world, the sky.

YLL
But then, the Universe has always been impossible.
And we? part of it.

He moves his hand out to almost touch WILDER'S BROW. We hear the merest whisper of "DRINK TO ME ONLY WITH THINE EYES."

YLL pulls back from the revelation.

WILDER, sensing something, half hearing the remnant of a song, slowly puts his hand out toward YLL'S BROW. We hear a far off echo of "BEAUTIFUL OHIO."

WILDER, in turn, lets his hand drop, almost alarmed, but curious.

WILDER
You...?

YLL responds. Both are in a moment of recognition.

YLL
And...you?

WILDER glances off at the Martian landscape below.

WILDER
Our first landing...that was...your place?

YLL nods, quietly.

WILDER
That bed...your bed. That love...your love?

YLL does not nod, but his eyes ignite with memory.

Seeing this, WILDER says:

WILDER
I did not plan for that.

YLL
No. But still you have conquered, you have won. We are an old race, soon lost. I will deliver to you and your people the charts and papers of consignment for all of our world.

WILDER
I will refuse them.

YLL
You cannot refuse what is given by the dead.

He holds out his hand again. WILDER again tries to take it. As if both were invisible, fleshless, their fingers fall through, melt through each other.

YLL
You see, even now I am not quite here. I go now to take refuge in the past. There, beyond, do you see? Do you hear? The music. The lights. The fine people?

He points.

At landscape near the dead seas, with an ancient city glowing with firefly lights and the sound of distant music, and the shapes of people, like ghosts moving in the streets.

WILDER looks.

And the landscape is empty, a solitude of shadows.

WILDER
I see nothing.

YLL accepts this.

YLL
Well then. You. Where going?

WILDER nods beyond YLL. We see the EARTH SETTLEMENT and its lights and music.

WILDER
To a new place with new people and lights and, yes, music.

YLL looks.

Nothing. That landscape is also empty.

YLL shakes his head.

WILDER
You don't see my place just as I don't see yours?

YLL
Perhaps there is no Past and no Future. Perhaps you have not been born yet. Perhaps I died long ago.

WILDER
Perhaps.

YLL
Well then again. Get on to those who wait for you.

WILDER
And you to yours.

YLL
I will arrive in time. The dead are patient. What does it matter who is Past, who is Future, if we are both alive and what follows must follow tomorrow or in one thousand years. Ah. There go the festival fires and the birds in my sky.

We see a PHANTOM ILLUMINATION of this, beyond WILDER.

WILDER looks and sees:

FIREWORKS over the NEW SETTLEMENT, rising, dying.

WILDER
How much the same. Take care.

YLL steps back.

YLL
It's too late for that. You...be careful.

WILDER
Of all that remains. I swear.

WILDER turns quickly and climbs into his JEEP.

Even as YLL'S delicate EMERALD MACHINE spiders by in the night.

CUT TO YLL, CLOSEUP, his face as his inner voice whispers:

YLL'S VOICE
I met no one on the road.

CUT TO WILDER, CLOSEUP, as he speaks to himself.

WILDER
He was never here.

INSTANT CUT TO the NEW EARTH SETTLEMENT, FIREWORKS as, at a distance, yet another LANDER flames down!

WILDER, at the tarmac below the landing craft, one by one welcomes the new immigrants, reaches out to:

Seize his WIFE and hug his CHILDREN! And then, beyond:

Handshake LAFARGE and HIS WIFE, newly arrived and with the death of their son visible in their pale faces.

WILDER
Mr. LaFarge. Mrs! Welcome! And, forgive! The press, such as it is, is always curious to know—

THE PRESS REPRESENTATIVE of the colony presses forward, a microphone in his eager hand. LAFARGE and HIS WIFE look at it with foreboding, but try an answer.

LAFARGE
Why we have emigrated to Mars? We—

MRS. LAFARGE
We have come to forget something.

THE PRESSMAN
And—?

WILDER (cuts in)
That's enough. To forget.

QUICK MOVE to the next arrivals. WILDER looks up into the faces of FATHERS STONE and PEREGRINE, confused but beaming.

WILDER
Father Stone, Father Peregrine?

FATHER STONE
We have come to find something.

FATHER PEREGRINE
Not that we have lost faith!

FATHER STONE
Mislaid it, perhaps?

FATHER PEREGRINE
Mislaid. Yes!

WILDER
Happy hunting, fathers.

WILDER greets a third arrival, swiftly.

WILDER
Mr. Stendahl?
STENDAHL
I am a destroyer. I have come to destroy.

WILDER stares at the landscape.

WILDER
So much is already dead.

STENDAHL
I will wake and kill it again!

WILDER (a beat)
You joke, of course.

STENDAHL (dryly)
I joke.

He moves off, pursued by BIGELOW, a living metaphor of nightmares.

WILDER can only look after, trying to recognize the nightmare.

As three cars pull away: LAFARGE and HIS WIFE in one.

FATHER PEREGRINE and FATHER STONE in the second.

STENDAHL and BIGELOW in the third, BIGELOW amused at watching his employer, STENDAHL, eyes blazing, lean into a terrible future.

WILDER looks surprised as:

PARKHILL drives by in a truck loaded with lumber.

WILDER, standing in another place, gazes up:

LAFARGE and his WIFE moving a few ramshackle bits of furniture into their modest hut.

WILDER shifts his gaze to:

FATHER PEREGRINE and FATHER STONE carrying artifacts, relics into the skeleton framework of their abuilding church.

Another shift and:

STENDAHL strides among his multitudinous works like a lunatic DeMille, shouting them to place mummies, skeletons, gorilla costumes, etc.

The LEFARGE hut door shuts, the lights go on.

The bell in the small church belfry clangs.

The Gothic doors of STENDAHL'S midnight abbey swing wide.

And PARKHILL hammers the last nail into a sign which, when THE CAMERA pulls back reads: LAST STAND HOT DOGS (Next nearest, 90 million miles away)!

Fresh rains fall, touching upon the LAFARGE hut, the open doors of the church where THE PRIESTS stand looking out, waiting for celebrants, STENDAHL'S Gothic roofs, and PARKHILL'S wayside stand.

STENDAHL, at a great WURLITZER ORGAN, plants his fingers on a single BACH CHORD! MUSICAL THUNDER!

THE PRIESTS place a crucifix on the altar, to the SOUND OF RAIN, LIGHTNING, THUNDER.

PARKHILL slaps some hot dogs on the grille!

And, in their shadowy hut dimly lit by smallish lightbulbs, the LEFARGE'S pour tea.

The rain stops and in the hills, faintly seen, a flow of ILLUMINATION can be made out, like a river of fireflies endlessly in motion.

CUT TO: WILDER and HIS FAMILY, on the porch of their smallish home, witnessing that far panoply of light.

As the rains cease and the LAFARGE door opens to see them gazing forth:

At those same strange ILLUMINATIONS in the hills.

And STENDAHL'S doors spring wide and he looks out:

At the same mysterious pageant of lights.

And PARKHILL, in his cafe door, narrows his eyes to see:

The similar scene, the firefly display in the shadowed hills.

FATHER PEREGRINE and FATHER STONE, in their doorway, glance down:

Across the way, half hidden by an outcrop of volcanic rock, A SINGLE FIGURE. Perhaps it can be made out that it is wearing a GOLDEN MASK. Perhaps not.

FATHER STONE whispers, standing by the side of FATHER PEREGRINE.

FATHER STONE
Our first celebrant, father?

They glance back into: their empty church. Then:

FATHER PEREGRINE, uncertain, opens his mouth to call welcome, when:

With a great seizure of noise, A JEEP pulls up with THREE MEN inside.

FATHER PEREGRINE'S face falls for:

Across the way, that possible church member has vanished.

THE MEN in THE JEEP shout happily.

CLOSEUP we see RABBI LEIBERMAN, driving, and beside him, a Baptist Minister, THE REVERAND WHITELAW. Behind them, a YOUNG MAN who we soon learn is a Mormon on a mission.

THE FATHERS gasp with honest appreciation.

FATHER PEREGRINE
Rabbi Leiberman!

LEIBERMAN
Father Peregrine. Father Stone. How's the fishing?

PEREGRINE
Galilee must be restocked!

They all laugh quietly as they climb out.

LEIBERMAN
Father, this is the Reverand Whitelaw from Sweet Water, Missouri.

PEREGRINE
Reverand! We met at the Interdenominational Conference five years ago.

WHITELAW
You remember!

LEIBERMAN
And this terribly young man is from Brigham Young in Salt Lake. Say something in Mormon, Robert.

JOHNSON
Fathers...

LEIBERMAN (cuts him off)
That's enough! Do all Roman churches stock great wines?

CUT TO: They are seated on the rear porch at twilight, lifting glasses.

LEIBERMAN (sips)
Manischevitz!

STONE
You were expecting Chianti Classico!?

LEIBERMAN
Manischevitz! (sips) L'Eichaim!

They all drink and laugh. At last in the silence THE REVERAND speaks their minds.

WHITELAW
Well, gentlemen, what are we doing here?

PEREGRINE
We are all busy feeling lonely.

They all murmur assent to that. PEREGRINE refills their glasses.

PEREGRINE
While we're waiting for our congregations of Earthmen or Martians, I suggest that you visit here next Sunday, gentlemen. Rabbi, Father Stone and I will come celebrate with you the following Friday and drop in on the good Reverand the third Sunday.

They all assent to that.

JOHNSON
My place next month. (a beat)
My apartment.

LEIBERMAN
And plan, week after week, where to find old sinners or young innocents to fill the pews.

STONE
More sinners from Chicago arrive tomorrow!

WHITELAW
Good!

They all laugh quietly.

LEIBERMAN
Meanwhile. (he looks out at the hills) Are there Martians? Rumors say all kinds, flesh and blood, ghosts, supernatural lights and...

At which moment, PEREGRINE quickens and stares off at the foothills.

WHITELAW
What?

LEIBERMAN (softly)
There. Oh, there!

They stare.

Far off in the foothills there is the familiar drift, a river of light, a mass of small fires cascading across the land.

THE FATHERS stare, the distant fires glowing on their faces.

WHITELAW
Good Lord, like St. Anthony's fires at sea...

STONE
Sh. Softly.

We see the flow of that river of illumination again, and THE MUSIC that whispers with it.

PEREGRINE (softly)
Martians.

JOHNSON
They're not human—

PEREGRINE watches the distant lights.

PEREGRINE
And what is human? A shape, a size, a color?
Quietly he calls out to them with an urgent whisper of admiration.

PEREGRINE
Yes...oh...yes.

WHITELAW
Can they hear you?
The distant fires change and flow.

PEREGRINE
They hear.

JOHNSON
And what will you say to them?

PEREGRINE
The miracle of mere Existence.

The lights vanish into the hills.

LEIBERMAN (stunned, in awe)
Jesus, Father?

PEREGRINE (pours wine)
G.K. Chesterton!!

CUT TO: They move through the empty chapel. It is late.

WHITELAW
A splendid evening!

LEIBERMAN
Ten percent I.Q., ninety proof wine. Now, tell me, why did we all become what we became? Who is this Rabbi? My parents died when I was ten. I needed a congregation. I found one. And you friends? Young Mormon friend, what sent you out to your faith?

JOHNSON
The Angel Moroni and parents who were glad I left home.

They all laugh gently. LEIBERMAN looks to WHITELAW.

WHITELAW
Myself, when nineteen, one night, heard the Lord say go, see, know, believe, do.

LEIBERMAN glances at STONE who nods to PEREGRINE to answer.

PEREGRINE
As a boy I went wild when I heard of a Second Coming. Christ would be born again. He would return! I wanted to be there to welcome Him. What better place than this?

JOHNSON
And will He return?

PEREGRINE
Yes. Or I'll be awfully disappointed.

They all laugh as they climb in their car.

PEREGRINE
Next Sunday? Early mass?

LEIBERMAN
Not too early! You provide wafer. I'll bring the wine!

They drive off, laughing quietly, as STONE gazes after. Then they shift their gaze to:

The distant hills. The soft bright glow of illumination, the strange Martian life forms that pass there.

They glance into their empty church and back at the lights.

PEREGRINE (quietly)
You, there. Welcome. Please (a beat)
come in.

THE ILLUMINATIONS move toward the Earth Settlement.
It starts to rain again, a gentle rain which touches the settlement.

And rains on the tin roof and the windows of the LAFARGE hut.

Inside, by a small electric hearth fire, LAFARGE and his wife ANNA are sipping their evening cocoa and listening to the rain. At last LAFARGE speaks.

LAFARGE
Here we are millions of miles away from Earth and yet...oh God, I wish we could have brought Tom with us.

ANNA (pulls back in pain)
Lafe, oh, Lafe...

LAFARGE
Sorry.

ANNA
He's been dead so long now, we must try to forget him and Earth!

LAFARGE holds his cup and stares into it.

LAFARGE
It's just...I miss driving out to Green Lawn Park Sundays to put flowers on his...grave. I—

But ANNA has risen and gone to lie down in bed and face away.

CLOSEUP, we see her face and the tears in her eyes.
LAFARGE shakes his head, silently cursing himself for making her unhappy. He shuts his eyes, whispers:

LAFARGE
It's just...

The wind blows against the house. There is a faint whistling sound from outside.

LAFARGE straightens up, listening.

LAFARGE
Anna?!

Turned away, she will not answer.

He half rises. The wind sounds. The merest flicker of a shadow crosses the window.

LAFARGE (a hoarse whisper)
...Anna...?

He rises and turns toward the door.

The door trembles as if someone leaned against it.

He moves uncertainly toward it and, at the door, hesitates to open, his hand on the knob.

He pulls the door wide. Rain falls on his face as he peers out at:

Just beyond, not a few yards away, a SHADOW FIGURE stands as if waiting.

Lightning cracks the sky, shining on LAFARGE'S face.

LAFARGE
Who is it? What do you want?

Silence. THE SHADOW does not move, though it seems to shake with some effort to break and run.

LAFARGE focuses his eyes.

THE SHADOW comes into the light. It is a YOUNG MAN, A BOY, no more than twelve years old. WE CUT BACK AND FORTH from his face, CLOSEUP, to LAFARGE'S stunned look. He cries out.

LAFARGE
Answer me! Who!

ANNA, CLOSEUP, flicks her eyes wide and without turning, calls out.

ANNA
Why are you shouting?

THE SHADOWY FIGURE hears her, trembles.

LAFARGE hears her and responds without turning, staring.

LAFARGE
We have a visitor! He...he looks like...Tom!

ANNA'S VOICE
You're drunk. Come to bed.

LAFARGE
No, come look, come see. Tom!

THE SHADOW waits.

Suddenly, ANNA is behind LAFARGE peering out into a flicker of lightning, a muted pulse of thunder.

THE SHADOW trembles.

LAFARGE'S VOICE
That is Tom, isn't it? Yes?

ANNA, stunned, pulls back.

ANNA
Go away!

LAFARGE
But—

ANNA
Go away. I'm afraid. Lock the door. I'm afraid!

She pulls back in shadow, runs off through the house as LAFARGE turns to regard THE VISITOR.

CLOSEUP, LAFARGE.

LAFARGE
Tom. If by some miracle that is you, I'll leave the door unlocked. It's cold. Come in. Lie by the hearth. Come in.

THE SHADOW trembles.

The door shuts.

ANNA feels LAFARGE climb into bed behind her.

ANNA
It's a terrible night. I feel so…old.

Behind her he listens, hears the outer door in the other room open quietly. The wind blows. Faint lightning. The door shuts.

CLOSEUP, his face as tears spring to his eyes, a mixture of renewal and joy and wonder. He puts his arm around ANNA.

LAFARGE
Hush. (a beat) Sleep.

Thunder fading into dawn light, the rain clearing away.

LAFARGE wakes, shakes his head, sits up in bed. ANNA is still asleep.

LAFARGE
A dream. Yes, that's what it was. Just a dream. (sighs)
Ah, well.

He goes to open the bedroom door, look out, and freezes, astonished.

A BOY of some twelve years sits by the small breakfast table, which is set for three, with plates laid out, toast popping up in a toaster and coffee being poured by the twelve year old.

LAFARGE cannot move.

THE BOY nods and laughs at him. It is, of course, TOM.

TOM
Good morning, father!

LAFARGE stumbles forward. Coffee is offered him. He at last thinks to take it.

LAFARGE
Tom!

TOM
Sit, father. Drink!

LAFARGE
How did you get here? You're alive.

TOM (buttering toast)
Shouldn't I be? Sit.

LAFARGE (sits, stunned)
But, Tom, on Earth, Green Lawn Park, Sundays, the flowers we brought you.

TOM
You do want me here, don't you?

LAFARGE
Yes, but...

TOM
Then why ask questions. Eat!

LAFARGE (looks at the toast)
Who told you to make breakfast?

TOM
You did. During the night! You imagined it. I did it.

TOM eats toast. LAFARGE, dumbfounded, can only nibble.

LAFARGE
But if your mother finds you here...the shock.

TOM (easily, smiling)
Don't worry. During the night, I sang to her and sang to her. Because I sang, she won't be shocked. You'll see. Hey!

For ANNA is suddenly there, across the room, standing as fresh as the dawn.

ANNA
Good morning, Lafe, Tom! Isn't it a fine day!

LAFARGE is shaken. TOM turns to laugh in his face.

TOM
You see? Coffee!?
He hands over a cup. ANNA takes it, sits down, pleased.

ANNA
Coffee!

CUT TO:

Outside. A clear day. TOM stands in the doorway looking as if he might run, might stay.

LAFARGE appears behind him.

LAFARGE glances back:

At ANNA, busy washing dishes. Then he turns back to TOM and speaks so she cannot hear.

LAFARGE
Tom...who are you, really?

TOM
Don't.

Startled, the boy puts his hands to his face.

LAFARGE
You can tell me. I'll understand. I've heard talk of the Martians; how rare they are and when they come among us they come as Earth Men. So...you're Tom and yet you're not. What?

TOM'S hands shield his face.

TOM
Don't doubt, please don't doubt me!

He turns and runs off.

LAFARGE
Tom!

But the boy runs off along the canal.

ANNA is at LAFARGE'S elbow suddenly.

ANNA
Good grief, you at it again?!

LAFARGE (watching TOM)
Anna, you remember Green Lawn Park, a gravestone, Tom having pneumonia?

ANNA (laughs)
How you do go on! (turns away)
Listen to the man!

She goes back inside, shaking her head, laughing.

Just as TOM rushes up, red-faced, panting, in some sort of panic. LAFARGE grabs hold.

TOM
Save me, save me!

LAFARGE
Tom, what happened?

TOM
There! I was almost trapped! That man!

LAFARGE stares off at A MAN near the canal, hands on hips, looking at LAFARGE and TOM.

TOM
He tried to hold on, trap me, keep me!

LAFARGE looks into his son's face which is multicolored, as if it might melt, or was melting back into the shape of TOM'S features.

LAFARGE stares at that distant and possible menace.

THE MAN shakes his head with contempt, waves his negation to them both, turns, stalks off.

LAFARGE
What...?

TOM
You'll protect me, won't you? Now that I'm here I want to stay. Just me, Tom. No other one. Just Tom, okay. Tom?

LAFARGE holds on to TOM'S face so it shifts, in some small and peculiar way, clones back to the age twelve.

LAFARGE
Tom you are. Tom you will always be!

TOM
No more doubts? No more questions?!

LAFARGE
No more.

He hugs TOM just as ANNA appears.

ANNA
No more what? It's Saturday! Let's go to town!

Both LAFARGE and TOM are panicked at this. CLOSEUP. CUT TO:

ANNA, in hat and coat, by the canal, turning back.

ANNA
Come on, you two!

Lagging back about twenty feet, FATHER and SON. TOM comes up with an excuse.

TOM
Dad...doesn't...feel well.

He stares at LAFARGE who takes this as almost hypnotic suggestion, suddenly feels his pulse, his own brow, starting to sweat.

LAFARGE
Odd...true. I don't. Feel well, that is.

ANNA strides back.

ANNA
Bosh! Let's see. (feels his face)
Nonsense. C'mon, for our celebration.

LAFARGE
Celebrating what?

She has to think, then it flashes upon her.

ANNA
Why being alive, of course. Just being alive! (marches off) Hup, two, three, four. Hup, two, three—

LAFARGE stares after her, glances at TOM.

LAFARGE
Okay?

TOM (obviously unhappy)
If you stay close. Stay near. Don't let go of me!

LAFARGE takes his hand. ANNA, ahead of them, yells:

ANNA
Well?

LAFARGE
Hup, two, three—

INSTANT CUT TO the swarming Earth Settlement, very busy for a small place. But it is Saturday, so CROWDS are moving back and forth.

Witnessed by ANNA, pleased.

And LAFARGE, concerned, glancing over at:

TOM, most fearful.

TOM
Let's go home!

ANNA
We just got here!

TOM
I'm afraid!

ANNA
What, all these people gonna bite you?

TOM
Eat me up. Yes!

ANNA turns to regard the lunatic son.

ANNA
Of all the—C'mon!

She plows into the CROWD

LAFARGE, determined to make the best of it, nods at TOM, pulls him along. TOM trails, very pale, his eyes darting now here, now there.

As THE CROWD passes, laughing, talking, shouting.

And ANNA pauses here, pauses there.

As LAFARGE, almost as nervous as TOM, nudges her on. She moves.

And THE CROWD moves, louder and still louder.

LAFARGE grips TOM'S hand, TIGHT!

We see the SHADOWS OF CHANGE ripple across TOM'S face. Very subtle at first. But his cheeks are changing color.

Anguished, sensing this, LAFARGE pulls TOM into a run.

ANNA, behind them, shouts.

ANNA
Hold on, you two. Where's the fire?

THE CROWD is rushing by.

TOM'S face begins to blur, to melt around the edges.

His eyes change color. He bleats.

TOM
Save me!

LAFARGE
Hold tight, Tom. We're going home!

At which moment, THREE DRUNKEN WORKMEN/ASTRONAUTS round a corner and collide with LAFARGE.

TOM, crying out, is broken free.

And by the time LAFARGE gains his balance and swerves to look around:

TOM is nowhere to be seen. THE CROWD closes in.

Bleating now, himself, LAFARGE lunges in this direction, then that, his eyes fixed wildly in one way, then another.

LAFARGE
Tom. Wait up!

He runs to his right, stops, glances about, turns back, runs to his left, freezes for a moment because:

Up ahead he sees A FAMILY gathered, in shock, weeping. In their midst a TWELVE YEAR OLD GIRL, also in shock, stunned.

LAFARGE intuitively guesses this is his goal! He leaps forward.

THE CAMERA closes in on THE FAMILY, their faces, their eyes filled with tears.

CLOSER yet, THE GIRL, blonde, but much the same size as TOM.

LAFARGE hesitates then cries out.

LEFARGE
No!

THE GIRL swivels her head, alarmed. ZOOM IN ON, her face beginning to amorphize back to HIS SON.

LAFARGE
Tom. Yes. Now. Tom.

THE FACE clones itself to TOM, who yells.

THE FAMILY, shocked, cannot move, put out their hands too late.

As LEFARGE drags TOM off back toward ANNA.

THE FAMILY, left behind, struck by lightning events, is frozen in place, lost in THE CROWD.

As LEFARGE collides with ANNA, grabs her, drags TOM.

ANNA
See here now…

LEFARGE
No, <u>you</u> see here! Out, off, out!

They rush only to be plowed into by A JEEP rounding a corner, going the wrong way perhaps. All yell.

LEFARGE pushes ANNA one way, TOM the other, falls, rolls free. THE JEEP roars by with shouting voices.

LEFARGE, defeated ahead of time, is afraid to look up at THE MOB, sees ANNA standing across from him, her hands to her mouth, as if to scream.

He turns, looks up at:

A SMALL CROWD nearby where, at its center, someone spins and turns. LEFARGE'S eyes narrow, flex, narrow.

ANNA
No, Tom, no. Oh God, what's happening?

As TOM, caught in THE CROWD, turns here, turns there. A WOMAN'S FACE to his right names him Ralph. A MAN'S face to his left cries: Elizabeth. A THIRD MAN cries: Will. A fourth: Marguerite!

As TOM becomes A GIRL, A BOY, A MAN, A WOMAN, all shadowed and melded swiftly by the instant in his face.

LAFARGE and ANNA try to plow through, reach out.

But THE CROWD is too thick and in full feeding frenzy. A DOZEN ARMS stretch out, a DOZEN HANDS wrench and clutch.

As TOM, wailing, is whirled in violent changes, EYES BLUE, EYES BROWN, HAIR LIGHT, HAIR DARK, FACE PALE, FACE TAN, until at the peak of all the shouts and names, all the hungry hands and passionate gazes, he flings his hands to his face, moans and falls down.

THE CROWD stands over him, in shock.

As LAFARGE at last pushes them aside and looks down.

At the body of this thing that was his son.

CLOSEUP of his face, destroyed by what he sees.

ANNA is at his side, suddenly.

LAFARGE
No, no. Anna. No.

He turns her away and looks back down again at:

The body and, ZOOM IN, the face of the dead creature where we see, CLOSEUP, features that are part TOM, part THE PRETTY GIRL seen three minutes ago with her weeping FAMILY, part MAN, part OLD WOMAN. But THE EYES are fixed and multicolored and the MOUTH is gaped wide and the entire body is still.

Someone reaches to feel the pulse, eyes shut, nods in despair, looks up and around, shakes his head.

The body lies there at their midst as, one by one, they start to drift away.

Leaving ANNA and LEFARGE alone, an audience of two in the now silent street, as, distantly, we hear an approaching siren. It starts to rain.

The rain falls down on the multi-textured, multi-colored strangely mixtured face.

LEFARGE'S VOICE
Come along, Anna.

He takes her elbow.

ANNA
But we can't leave him here...

LEFARGE'S VOICE
Come along, Anna...

He moves her off and away. The rain falls.

The area is empty, everyone has turned away.

With the rain falling on the body we MOVE IN and see, very faintly, HIS FINGERS, HIS HAND, at his side, twitch.

The rain falls. We MOVE IN ON HIS FACE as: Quickly, his eyes blink WIDE!

CUT TO THE HUT, late at night, rain falling.

Inside, in bed, the wind wails outside.

LEFARGE lifts his head, hears a sound.

ANNA
Hear something?

He rises.

At the door, he hesitates, looks through the window.

There may be something out there, there may be nothing.

He locks and bolts the door, steadfastly, coldly.

ANNA'S VOICE
What?

He switches off the porch light. In the raining dark he says:

LEFARGE
Nothing...

CUT TO:

THE rain stops with dull flashes of lightning and dim thunders and far off, the flow of those mysterious ILLUMINATIONS which riverrun above the low hills and dead seas as, along one of the deserted highways, a SMALL FIGURE hurries.

We follow THE FIGURE along at a distance. THE CAMERA paces it as it runs at a good pace by starlight and now the light of the Martian moons rising.

And we move in on THE FIGURE and find a remote resemblance to TOM, yet not quite the same, but THE FIGURE hurries, looking back as if pursued and slows at last as THE CAMERA reaches it and THE FIGURE stops to look in at:

The small church of FATHER PEREGRINE and STONE.

THE FIGURE lifts it face, attentive, curious, toward:

The upper window of the church rear.

And THE CAMERA moves in through the window to find:

In a smallish room, the two cots of THE PRIESTS, separated by a good eight or nine feet for comfort. Between, in a small niche, a votive candle throws its light at the feet of the Virgin Mary.

PEREGRINE is awake and ruminating. At last he speaks, quietly.

PEREGRINE
John Paul Peter Father Stone?

STONE, eyes closed, but hears and is amused.

STONE
Here.

PEREGRINE
Are you and I good priests?

STONE
What a question for long after midnight.

PEREGRINE
...<u>are</u> we?

STONE
It is a sin of pride, but yes.

PEREGRINE continues in the dark. We see mostly his eyes.

PEREGRINE
Then...what if...we <u>didn't</u> go searching for parishioners, Earthmen, Martians, to fill our church? The doors downstairs are open wide to let the Martian weather in. So let us just lie quietly and think: we're not so bad, we do know the difference between good and evil. If we thought that, mightn't the Martians come?

STONE
If they read our minds...telepathy?

PEREGRINE (nods)
And if, father, we with our thoughts say, we are travelers, on our way to Eternity. Mars is but a waystation to all Time and Space. We come like water and like wind we go. Our destination? Forever. Our occupation? To

know the Universe. We are the Eyes of Time, born to witness and celebrate. We carry the gift of life to Mars and beyond, to the farthest star systems. To be Immortal. To live forever. So our children's children's children a million years from now will know life and thank us for the gift. We ask you to give us passage.

(A beat. He turns to look at FATHER STONE across the midnight room)

If we think that, father, and truly believe it, won't the Martians come?

FATHER STONE lies there, his eyes brimming, nods then quickens, listening.

In the night a faint sound of dripping water.

STONE
I think they have heard and are here.

Both sit up and listen, glance over at the bedroom doorway which stands open. We can see a faint light from below.

Both put their feet to the floor. PEREGRINE takes an object from the night-table nearby, gestures absolute quiet, as he moves toward the door.
At the stairwell, they look down, hearing the constant dripping sound.

PEREGRINE nods STONE to stay, goes down alone.

Below, PEREGRINE looks out of the door of the church.

The night is dark. Only stars and the illuminations lost in the hills.

He glances back in at the church. He takes a step inside the door and listens. Distantly, there is that sound of water dripping.

As he approaches the alcove wherein lies the baptismal font, the sound grows louder.

CLOSEUP, THE CAMERA moves with him, quietly, alert.

He comes into the door of the baptistry and blinks, fixing his gaze.

Beyond the baptismal font there is a shape, a white luminescence.

FATHER PEREGRINE focuses his gaze and cries out, quietly.

PEREGRINE
No...no...

The image beyond the font takes full shape. It is the GHOST FIGURE, the ambiance of Christ!

PEREGRINE, in shock, pulls back.

PEREGRINE
Can't be...

THE FIGURE beyond the font lifts its hand.

We see his wrist, CLOSEUP. Blood falls.

To strike the baptismal water.

PEREGRINE gasps.

PEREGRINE
...we've waited so long...

He sinks to his knees.

THE GHOST
No...no...let be...!

PEREGRINE'S hands are thrust out toward the image.

PEREGRINE
...welcome!

THE IMAGE tries to pull its hand back from the font.

THE GHOST
No, no...don't keep me...you don't understand!

PEREGRINE
What more must I know? You're here!

THE GHOST trembles, growing pale.

THE GHOST
I am not what you think! Your thought has trapped me. Your dream has kept me, locked me in place, made me...this!

THE GHOST stares at his wrist, the wound, the blood.

THE GHOST
If you hold me, I will die!

PEREGRINE
I mean you no harm.

THE GHOST
Let go. Let be.

PEREGRINE'S voice fades with disillusionment.

PEREGRINE
...you are...Martian?

THE GHOST IMAGE trembles and nods.

THE GHOST
That.

PEREGRINE
Just let me look at you.

THE GHOST
I die. I will send the others!

PEREGRINE looks at the open doorway and beyond to the far ILLUMINATIONS.

PEREGRINE
The others?

THE GHOST
They will come. I say it is so. Quickly!

PEREGRINE
I'll set you free if you promise to come back, once each year.

THE GHOST
Once each year?

PEREGRINE
Easter morn. The morning of Easter!

THE GHOST nods, accepting.

THE GHOST
I know your celebrations. (a beat)
Avert your gaze!

PEREGRINE, with a terrible wrench, throws his arm across his face.

The image of the ghost of the Carpenter of Nazareth cries out with release.

A last drop of blood strikes the water!

Its impact jolts FATHER STONE above. Finally he hears a quiet weeping below.

Moving down the stairs, he stops at the baptistry door to see FATHER PEREGRINE on his knees, hands clasped, tears running down his face.

STONE helps PEREGRINE to his feet where he holds tight to his brother priest.

STONE peers into this face of despair, questioning.
CLOSEUP, PEREGRINE speaks.

PEREGRINE
Someday…I will tell you!

STONE
What…?

But he stops, for they hear a vast whispering hum drawing near.

They look out at the empty church where a soft river of light is moving in.

Their faces are colored by the sight.

And, LONG SHOT, the row on row of pews are vibrant with the moving fires.

From outside, we see the creek of fire crossing the night, entering the wide-open doors. The humming dies. Far away we hear:

FATHER PEREGRINE
I am Father Peregrine. This is Father Stone.

QUICK FADE TO BLACK as the doors quietly shut.

QUICK FADE UP on the doors of STENDAHL'S Gothic architecture. The front doors shiver, tremble to open!

As do the stained glass windows.

And THE CAMERA PULLS BACK from the massive Gothic structure which, obviously, is mostly facade, a super motion picture set, flimsy but solid looking if you only see it from one side. Massive SYMPHONIC MUSIC HERE or BACH'S TOCCATA AND FUGUE played on two dozen grand opera organs.

THE CAMERA PULLS BACK until it finds STENDAHL and BIGELOW who nods with pride as STENDAHL recites, staring at the dark grand structure:

STENDAHL
'During the whole of a dull, dark, and soundless day in the autumn of the year, as the shades of evening drew on, I found myself within view of the melancholy House of Usher.'

BIGELOW, in the following exchange, presses his computer radio control. The light changes on the face of the house. The windows illumine with candlelight and blink out. Smoke rises in a funeral plume from the chimney. Ravens settle on the roof.

BIGELOW
Is the house I have built for you desolate and terrible?

STENDAHL
Very desolate, very terrible! What an architect you are!

BIGELOW
The mechanical ravens! Evil?

STENDAHL
Amazingly evil!

MR. BIGELOW consults his architectural plans.

BIGELOW
Does the entire structure cause a sickening of the heart, a dreariness of thought?

STENDAHL
Mr. Bigelow, my heart sickens! Glorious!

BIGELOW
Notice, it's always twilight here, always October, barren, sterile, dead. Hidden weather machines that blot out the sun.

STENDAHL drinks it in, the dreariness, the crumbling horror, the extensive decay!

BIGELOW (uneasily)
Now that my job's done I must ask what you're going to do with this...Usher?

STENDAHL
Does the name Usher and Edgar Allen Poe mean nothing to you?

BIGELOW blinks, shakes his head.

STENDAHL snorts in dismay.

STENDAHL
No books in your life, eh, Bigelow? A nonreader? Poe's books were banned from libraries years ago.

BIGELOW
Ah. One of <u>those</u>!

STENDAHL
Yes, one of those! He and Lovecraft, Hawthorne, Stephen King and their tales of terror banned!

BIGELOW (blind to it all)
I see.

STENDAHL
<u>Do</u> you? The word 'escape' was suspicious!

BIGELOW (numbly)
Was it?

STENDAHL
Every man, they said, must face reality. All the great literary flights of fancy must be shot in mid-air! The Headless Horseman and Once Upon A Time became No More! They served Jack Pumpkinhead with meringue at the Biologists' Ball! The Beanstalk died in a mess of red tape as they smashed Alice in Wonderland's Looking Glass!

STENDAHL clenches his fists, stops as BIGELOW, astounded, blinks at Usher.

BIGELOW
Dear me. This house we've built, it's unlawful, yes? A criminal architecture! I didn't realize!

STENDAHL
Too late, Bigelow. You're in this up to your bloody gills!

BIGELOW
No. Here's the master control.

He presses a button. The USHER front doors fling wide.

BIGELOW
Your House of Usher is open. God save you. Goodbye!

He spins about, runs as STENDAHL stabs the controls.

The House emits a great surge of violins, horns, organ chords! Again, again...AGAIN! All the windows vibrate and shine. A huge funeral plume, the largest of all, puffs like an atomic cloud from the top-most chimney. A dozen incredible huge ravens scream and lift into the sky!

As STENDAHL, dazzled, his eyes and cheeks flamed with the view, beams and grins to the greatest flamboyant Orchestral ram-bam-BAMM of all. QUICK DISSOLVE OUT.

DISSOLVE IN ON: The entire HOUSE is lit, the MUSIC blares in a wondrous Strauss waltz, every window is full of candles, the doors are wide and people in costume are mounting the front steps to enter the vast doors while:

STENDAHL smiles at them.

STENDAHL
Yes! Welcome, welcome, friends, cohorts, alarmists, critics, destroyers of the dream. Usher awaits!

More ROCKET MOTOR BIKES pull up at the curb. More 21st Century ELECTRIC VANS park to let forth women and men in masks, dressed like characters from various banned plays and books. Here's ALICE, here's OZMA, there's MARLEY from Dickens, and here's the GHOST OF CHRISTMAS PAST. They surge past STENDAHL who laughs, waves them in with glad cries.

STENDAHL
Champagne and booze, booze and wild drinks, inside!

People pass, waved in by STENDAHL who suddenly focusses his gaze:

On a LONE FIGURE at the edge of the crowd, a slender figure with a GOLDEN MASK.

STENDAHL approaches happily.

STENDAHL
Welcome! We have twelve Hunchbacks, ten Draculas, fourteen Wolfmen already arrived. And your costume represents—?

Behind the GOLDEN MASK the GOLDEN EYES fix STENDAHL quietly. He raises his hand, touches STENDAHL'S brow.

STENDAHL'S face lights up. He is obviously being given a telepathic revelation. He nods, smiles.

STENDAHL
Ah, yes! Surely! You come as witness, yes! There's much to see! Stand there!

STENDAHL leaves THE MAN IN THE GOLDEN MASK (a Martian, of course) and turns as:

THE CAMERA mounts the steps with the costumed brigade and, inside, views the whirlabout waltzing of three dozen or more DANCERS, HUNCHBACKS, VAMPIRES, WEREWOLVES, etc.

CUT BACK to the happy STENDAHL as:

A last dull-silver nondescript JETBIKE hums to a stop and A MAN with a dead face, pale, but with needle eyes, scans THE HOUSE.

STENDAHL (offers wine)
Why, Mr. Garrett, from the Politically Correct Moral Climates Department, as I live and breathe! Drink!

GARRETT (accepts the wine)
Not for long. Mr. Stendahl, what, pray tell, is this?

STENDAHL
A haunted castle!

STENDAHL refills GARRETT'S glass.

GARRETT
Haunted!

STENDAHL
I have built a sanctuary where copper bats fly on electric beams, brass rats scuttle, and robot skeletons dance! All computerized!

GARRETT
And who are those dancing fools?

STENDAHL
Enemies!

GARRETT
You've imported one hundred enemies from Earth for your housewarming?

STENDAHL waves to each passing reveler and hastens to freshen GARRETT'S drink.

STENDAHL
Eminent educated, super bright members of the Society for the Prevention of Halloween and Frankenstein. Learned professors, psychiatrists, psychologists, clean citizens who scoff at Beauty to slay the Beast. Assassins of The Mummy, who would make The Invisible Man truly invisible, kill forever all witches and ghosts,

lunatic tumors on your brain, cut you open, cut it out. No more nightmare skeletons under the bed. No more fun!

GARRETT
Excellent!

STENDAHL
Then you are my enemy!

GARRETT
So? I shall kill your house, Stendahl! My Dismantlers are coming to make your place ruins. Fool! Wasting your fortune on this folly!

STENDAHL (offers more wine)
No waste! Run my Toy for three hours! You must turn in a full report, right?

GARRETT
Right!

STENDAHL
Then you must know all my criminal acts! Come quick, look-see!

After a long beat GARRETT jumps off his BIKE.

GARRETT
Lead on. No tricks!

The door to the House of User creaks wider, sighing, moaning.

GARRETT steps in, freezes, for:

A rat prances across the parquetry, falls, and from its nylon fur streams hordes of metal fleas.

GARRETT
Damn!

A TAROT WITCH in a niche hisses through a toothless mouth.

THE WITCH
Death!

GARRETT
Deplorable!

STENDAHL
You may chop her personally!

GARRETT
Chop, yes!

An ape jumps forth, shrieking!

STENDAHL
Fear not!

He taps the animal's chest. We can hear it click and hum.

STENDAHL
Wires and digits, sir, digits and wires!

GARRETT touches the thing timidly.

GARRETT
Why, Mr. Stendahl? What obsessed you?

STENDAHL
Bureaucracy, Mr. Garrett. Critics! Laughed at my books and friends! Pikes!?

PIKES looms nearby, his face shadowing as STENDAHL speaks!

STENDAHL
Pikes, the greatest horror film actor. The man of a thousand faces! Better than Lon Chaney, Karloff, Lugosi! Fired! Forbidden even to act himself in a mirror! How was it, Pikes, when they seized your films, yanked out your guts!?

PIKES growls and makes strangling gestures.

STENDAHL
In time, Pikes, in time!
(to the guests)
This way! Get your costumes! Masque of the Red Death is next!

THE GUESTS pop into booths, pop out in costume! The House shakes! GARRETT stares.

CLOSEUP of the floor, which throbs.

GARRETT
What...?

STENDAHL
The Telltale Heart, of course! The Telltale Heart!

A scream. GARRETT turns.

An ORANGUTAN stuffs a woman up a chimney.
GARRETT recoils as THE SAME WOMAN touches his elbow.

LUCIE CROMWELL
I'm Cromwell, the eminent psychiatrist. Did you think that was me stuffed up the chimney? Like Murders in the Rue Morgue?

GARRETT
I—

LUCIE CROMWELL
No, no. That was my computerized duplicate! The ape killed a robot. I am the real Cromwell.

GARRETT stares at the chimney.

A few cogs and some computer tape drop out.

GARRETT, UP CLOSE, is stunned. Another shriek.

A screaming MAN in a pit, strapped in place, shrieking.

A huge PENDULUM BUTCHER KNIFE swings back and forth, nearing his chest.

GARRETT stares, horrified.

THE PENDULUM STRIKES!

CUT TO GARRETT, shocked, as THE MAN stops screaming.

A SIMILAR MAN appears at his elbow.

THE MAN
That's not me. Another robot!

A SKULL FACED MAN, in scarlet, strides forth!

THE SCARLET MAN
Let the Masque of the Red Death begin!

Instantly, THE COUPLES, in DEATH MASKS, whirl in a funeral waltz, echoing Strauss. GARRETT rears back.

GARRETT
Nightmare! Sacrilege! Call my police, now!

STENDAHL (hands him a cellular phone)
Here! But for a final report you must see
your own robot, yes!?

STENDAHL stomps the floor. A panel slides back revealing a stairway down to catacombs. STENDAHL seizes a torch, descends, hesitates.

STENDAHL
Well! You do want to see your handsome self as a perfect computerized macho clone?! Garrett, come meet Garrett! Now!

GARRETT follows, THE CAMERA goes along while, above, the Masque of the Red Death whirls on. They descend in shadows.

GARRETT (nervously)
Where is this other Garrett? My other self?

STENDAHL
Watch it. Around here. Take this. (hands him a bottle)

GARRETT (reads)
Amon—Amontill—

STENDAHL
Amontillado! Know the name?

GARRETT
Should I?

STENDAHL
You may well wish you did! Drink!

GARRETT
I'm drunk already!

STENDAHL
Drink!

He leads GARRETT, drinking, on through the catacombs.

STENDAHL
Here we are! Recognize this?

STENDAHL points to a cell.

STENDAHL
Or this?
He produces a trowel from under his cape, smiling.

GARRETT
What?

STENDAHL
What indeed! Step in!

They step into the cell where STENDAHL swiftly chains GARRETT.

GARRETT (shouts)
What are you doing?

STENDAHL
I'm being ironic. Don't interrupt a man when he's being ironic.

GARRETT
Chains?!

STENDAHL
So I can leave you here!

GARRETT
You're joking.

STENDAHL
Joking!

GARRETT
Where's my robot duplicate? Don't we see <u>him</u> killed?

STENDAHL
There *is* no duplicate.

GARRETT
But the <u>others</u>!

STENDAHL
The ones you saw killed were the real people. The duplicate robots stood and watched.

GARRETT is dumbfounded.

STENDAHL
Now you must say, 'For the love of God, Montresor!' And I will reply, 'Yes, for the love of God.' <u>Say</u> it.

GARRETT
Fool!

STENDAHL
Say 'For the love of God, Montresor!'

GARRETT (sobering)
Idiot!

STENDAHL
Put this on!

STENDAHL tosses something that chimes.

STENDAHL
A cap and bells. Wear it and I might set you free! Put it on!

GARRETT obeys. The bells tinkle.

STENDAHL
Don't you feel this has all happened before?

STENDAHL sets to work with trowel and mortar and brick.

GARRETT
What are you doing?

STENDAHL
Walling you in, yes.

GARRETT
You're mad! You'll be jailed for this!

STENDAHL
Perhaps.

STENDAHL taps a brick and places it on the wet mortar, humming.

Now there is a thrashing and pounding and a crying out from within the darkening place. The bricks rise higher.

STENDAHL
More thrashing, please.

There is one last brick to place. The screaming is continuous.

STENDAHL (calls softly)
Garrett?

GARRETT silences himself.

STENDAHL
Do you know why I've done this to you? Because you banned Mr. Poe's books without reading them. Otherwise you'd have realized what I was going to do to you when we came down just now! Ignorance, Mr. Garrett, ignorance!

GARRETT is sullenly silent.

STENDAHL
Let this be perfect.

STENDAHL shoves his lantern in to light the slumped figure.

STENDAHL
Jingle your bells softly.
(the bells rustle)
Now say, 'For the love of God, Montresor.'

GARRETT'S face comes up in the light to gasp:

GARRETT
For the love of God, (a beat)
Montresor.

STENDAHL
Gah! Requiescat in pace!

STENDAHL shoves the last brick in place! CUT TO:

A midnight clock sounds above STENDAHL.

STENDAHL
Party's over!

There is a great shout of laughter and disappointment.

STENDAHL
So long, all you lovely flesh and blood critics and self-appointed censors. Farewell!

He stabs his hand-held control.

All the windows and doors SLAM SHUT to shrieks!

He presses again. Earthquake. The House begins to sink!

STENDAHL stands supremely satisfied amidst it all.

PIKES shouts.

PIKES
Escape!

STENDAHL
No, no, I join my dear friends, alive and mechanical. Don't Captains always go down with their ships? Usher! Great Second House of Usher! Fall!

The House shudders, sinks!

STENDAHL beams as the water brims his neck, his chin!

The entire Gothic architecture vanishes in thunder.

CUT TO: THE MARTIAN IN THE GOLDEN MASK.

Lifting his gaze, the MARTIAN examines the stars.

Where far Earth thunders sound!

THE MARTIAN backs off, goes.

Across the empty desert, AN ARMADA OF SANDSHIPS rush forward, their sails full of the night wind, their prows skimming the sand.

We see the bottoms of the ships surfing the blowing desert sands.

As the great sails bloom and flutter and bloom again with wind.

And up front in each ship, A MARTIAN with a GOLDEN MASK.

As in the sky we see a constellation of ROCKETS, a half dozen, coming down toward MARS and then, strangely, turning about and heading back through space as a RADIO VOICE, shrouded by static, murmurs, "Come home...come home..." SWIFT CUT TO:

The desert and CUT AFTER CUT AFTER CUT of the MARTIAN SANDSHIP SAILS whipping up on their masts, immense and as beautiful as the airblown spider filaments on which certain spiders take to the air and float off on the wind. Sail after sail blooms up with a great hollow thundering. CUT TO:

The empty highway, with PARKHILL'S WIFE staring first in one direction, then the other.

Another view of silent roadway. PARKHILL'S VOICE cuts in.

CUT TO PARKHILL up on a ladder tinkering with the "H" in HOT DOGS, cursing.

PARKHILL
See anything?

THE WIFE
To my left. Nothing. To my right. Nothing. Sam—

He almost falls off the ladder.

PARKHILL
Well don't just stand there. Do something.

THE WIFE
Like?

PARKHILL
Cutting onions, slicing the buns. They'll be along any minute now!

She leans out, peers.

THE WIFE
I see a tumbleweed fifty yards up.
(looks the other way)
A sidewinder dust-devil the other.

PARKHILL gazes off.

PARKHILL
I can feel it. I can just feel them on the way. Hot diggity! Sell ten thousand dogs the first year! Sell—

She is looking at the sky.

PARKHILL
Now what?

THE WIFE
I dunno. Something funny. Nothing coming down the road. But feels like, up there, something going away.

PARKHILL
What the Sam Hill could be going away!?

THE WIFE
You tell me, Sam. I—

He leans out on the air, squinting, sniffing.

PARKHILL
Yes, sir! My first customers, and more tomorrow and the day after, when the immigration really hits. Sockdolager! Quiet. Hear? Hear?!

She moves out nearer the road.

THE WIFE
Something...

PARKHILL
Everything. Hit the lights, Cora.

THE WIFE
I dunno—

PARKHILL
The lights. Hit 'em!

She touches the light switch below. The HOT DOG sign comes on, buzzing with a short. WHAM...at the very instant, stunned with a mysterious arrival, PARKHILL clutches the ladder and stares.

As does his WIFE on the road.

As along the highway, surfing the desert sand, come two, four, six, ten SANDSHIPS, whispering and whipping the wind.

PARKHILL cannot believe it and starts a slow descent.

PARKHILL
Holy Moses, I hope they don't mind my—

She interrupts him, looking up at the proud SHIPS settling to rest all across the road.

THE WIFE
Do Martians eat hot dogs, Sam?

PARKHILL
Shut up, woman.

At the bottom of the ladder he lunges at the front of the stand and turns with a pistol in his hand.

THE MARTIAN in the prow of the first ship raises his hand with a silver object in it.

PARKHILL, panicked, fires.

The shot misses THE MARTIAN but tears the huge silver sail which collapses with an immense sigh.

THE MARTIAN, unaffected, tosses the silver object.

PARKHILL, not knowing whether to catch or drop it, does half of each. The object lies at his feet.

THE WIFE
Pick it up, Sam.

PARKHILL
Don't move!

THE WIFE
It's okay. Pick it up.

PARKHILL
Women's intuition. Damn.

But she has reached him and picked the object up. He pulls back. She shakes it and a scroll unrolls, a beautifully rendered chart, blueprint, map of this Martian territory with magnificent hieroglyphics around the rims.

PARKHILL (startled)
What's *that*?!

THE WIFE
What's it look like! A map. A chart. The layout of this whole territory.
(she glances up)
Right?

THE MARTIAN in the GOLDEN MASK nods.

PARKHILL (still fearful)
How do you know?

THE WIFE
He told me.

PARKHILL
I didn't hear—

THE WIFE
So he told me, in my head.

PARKHILL
Don't listen.

THE WIFE
Too late. I already have. It's a lease, a grant, giving all of this territory, from the hills over there to the desert over there, to the even further hills there and beyond. Yes?

She looks up. THE MARTIAN nods.

PARKHILL
Make him tell me, himself!

THE WIFE
He already has. He says inside here,
(touches her head) and it comes out here.
(touches her mouth) All this, he says...

Behind the mask we see the mouth of THE MARTIAN move in pantomime as she continues.

THE WIFE
All this territory, he says, two thousand acres, including your stupid hot dog stand—

PARKHILL
He didn't say that!

THE WIFE
No, that was me. All these two thousand acres are given over to one Samuel J. Parkhill and Co. Does that mean me? From this day forward to the end of time on this world or any other world.

PARKHILL (astounded)
Me? Mine? Mine all mine, all this!

THE WIFE
That's what the man says, and so says the map, the grant, this here.

PARKHILL
Gimme that!

He grabs it away and shakes it out to stare at it.

PARKHILL
Two thousand across. Sam Parkhill's spread!
(stops suddenly) How come? What goes on here? Why give it to me right now, tonight, just as—

THE MARTIAN raises his hand and points it at the sky. He inclines his head toward the sky, also, looking high at the stars.

As do THE OTHER MARTIANS on their SANDSHIPS.

His WIFE looks up, as does SAM.

And we see what they see, THE ROCKETS reversing their fires and circling back toward EARTH.

Slowly, PARKHILL unhooks the portable hand-held radio from his blouse, switches it on. Static and more static. Earth voices. News announcements, but erased with floods of static. Only a few words come through:

RADIO VOICE
....home...come home...back...come back ...and back...

And then a flood of immense statics and silence. PARKHILL shakes the radio. Nothing. Shakes it again. Nothing. The broadcasts are dead.

The wind blows. The immense sails blossom with thunders.

PARKHILL stares at the sky, and at the chart in his hands.

With a great roar of wind in the sails, the SANDSHIPS turn and surf way up the highway, swiftly, gone.

The highway is empty.

THE HOT DOG SIGN short circuits, fizzles out.

THE WIFE looks at the dark sign and at the sky.

THE WIFE
Got news for you, Sam.

He looks at her.

THE WIFE
Looks like it's going to be...an Off Season.

The chart rattles, rustles in his grip like a frantic bird. The wind seizes it, whips it away.

It rushes down the road into darkness. We hold on it, far away, until there is nothing to see in all that emptiness.

Then—WHAM! Along the highway, somewhere, going at high speed, our planter of bushes and grass and trees, BENJAMIN DRISCOLL himself, happily speeding toward a distant town, singing, whistling, smiling.

DRISCOLL
Okay, radio, don't talk. Yes? Yes? No.
(jiggles the radio switch, shuts it off, shrugging)
Not far now. One mile. Let's put on more speed.
(hits the throttle) How long's it been, pal? Three weeks, no, four! Back in those damn hills, grave digging, excavating for the past. Alone, all alone. But heck, I don't mind. Still, I'm ready now for a little special friendship, good company. I'm ready for—

He pulls into the edge of town and brakes.

WE PULL OUR CAMERA AWAY from him and his Jeep to find him isolated in an abandoned land, the tarmac of the rocket gantry country, but no rockets, no people, just dust and blowing paper.

A newspaper fluffs across the tarmac and clings to his legs. He bends to peel it away and hold it up.

We see what he sees, a headline of a newspaper.

EARTH SILENT. RADIO STILL.
Urgent requests: Come home, come home.
(sub headline)
No reasons given. Massive Earthquakes?
Another Biblical Flood?
An Atomic Accident?
(and below, repeated in smaller type)
Come home. Come home.

DRISCOLL shambles across the tarmac, like one drunk with terror and revelation, looking from side to side and up and then back down and around...

Near a rocket station frame-house and calls out:

DRISCOLL
Anyone home? Anyone here?

The wind blows gusts of newspapers across the empty field. CUT TO:

He is at the head of a street in a nearby town.

DRISCOLL
Home? Anyone??

He looks around, assailed by this isolation.

DRISCOLL (to himself)
I like being alone...but this is ridiculous.

He stands in a saloon bar door.

DRISCOLL
Do you need a drink, sir?
(nods to himself)
I do.

CUT TO him drawing a beer.

DRISCOLL
How much?

He punches a cash register. The NO SALE ticket jumps up (digital, that is).

DRISCOLL
On the house. Proslt! (drinks)

The phone rings. It rings three times before it sinks in. He spins around and grabs the phone.

DRISCOLL
Hold on—hello.

Silence. A hum. Too late. He throws down the phone.

DRISCOLL
They'll call back. Got to. Must be someone else left on Mars. Not just me.

The thought panics him. He pulls the beer-throttle to refill his glass, then stares at the wall by the phone.

DRISCOLL (reads)
Hot stuff. Call...

He dials the number. A woman's voice comes on.

DRISCOLL
Thank God. Listen—

THE PHONE MACHINE VOICE
This is Helen Barsumian. I am not home. Leave your name and number and—

He hangs up and carries the telephone book out into the light.

DRISCOLL
If I start at the A's and work through to the Z's, gotta be someone somewhere. Only take a year to get through the book. I—

A phone rings across the street in an open booth. He breaks into a frantic run, grabs the phone. A voice says:

THE VOICE
This is William Tibbells. I represent your local newspaper which—

DRISCOLL slams the phone, picks up the phone book, looks, dials.

A WOMAN'S VOICE answers.

THE VOICE
Thank you for your call. This is Alice—

DRISCOLL
Alice, now hear this. You—

He cannot force himself to swear, slams the phone down.

Nearby, another phone rings. He strolls, pretending to ignore it.

At last, exhausted with stress, he hurries to answer.

A WOMAN'S VOICE
Hello, are you there?

DRISCOLL
Are you?

THE WOMAN
Are you <u>real</u>?

DRISCOLL
Are <u>you</u>?

THE WOMAN
Thank God, not an answering service. I'm the last woman alive on Mars!

DRISCOLL
I seem to be the last man.

She laughs almost hysterically. He is forced to join her.

THE WOMAN
Where are you?

DRISCOLL
Tell me. I'll come to you!

THE WOMAN
This is Genevieve Selzer and I'm in Schenectady Two...

DRISCOLL
That's two hundred miles from here. Where will you be?

THE WOMAN
At the Rose of Sharon Beauty Parlor on the main street which is only two blocks long and—

DRISCOLL
Don't move. I'll be there in two hours!

THE WOMAN
Not so fast—

DRISCOLL
Watch my dust!

CUT TO: He leaps in his Jeep and rushes off, singing and whistling. He passes town after town, all empty.

Dust and leaves and newspapers blowing in the wind.

This hurts him for a moment but then he remembers where he is going and plows the wind, singing.

DRISCOLL (singing)
Oh, Genevieve, sweet Genevieve,
The years may come, the years may go—

The towns flash by. He brakes because:

A SIGN looms up, SCHENECTADY TWO. Pop. 947.

He hits the gas.

Skids into the middle of Main Street, looks around, dismayed.

We see what he sees: no sign of the BEAUTY PARLOR.

His eyes search and then, suddenly:

To a CHORD OF MUSIC, THE ROSE OF SHARON lights flash on.

His eyes scrutinize:

The front window of the shop where, beautifully arranged, someone (GENEVIEVE?) has placed two chairs at a table, candlelight, and a bottle of wine.

He beams at this and might move from the Jeep, but:

A WOMAN'S FIGURE appears in the doorway of the shop.

He is momentarily delighted at this.

THE WOMAN, in half shadow, calls to him.

THE WOMAN
Benjamin Riskind, is that you?

DRISCOLL (momentarily perturbed)
Driscoll. Benjamin Driscoll.

She regains her composure there in the shadow.

THE WOMAN
Oh, yes. Driscoll. Benjamin. This is Genevieve, sweet Genevieve.

He mutters to himself with admiration.

DRISCOLL
Yeah...yeah...she knows the words to the great song... (calls) Genevieve.

GENEVIEVE (calls back)
Benjamin!

She steps out into the light. We only see her as a flash of plump whiteness for a moment.

DRISCOLL looks as if someone had thrown a quart of cold water in his face. Shocked, is what he is. His eyes widen. His mouth gapes.

She takes another step into the light, spreading her arms to let him see a white gossamer web of bridal wings around and behind her.

He gapes.

We see at last in a SMASHING CLOSEUP, GENEVIEVE in her pure white wedding dress, all three hundred pounds of her! She smiles demurely.

DRISCOLL bleats, almost to himself.

DRISCOLL
...Genevieve...?

She hears the bleat and reassures him, calling across the distance.

GENEVIEVE
The one and only...

BENJAMIN DRISCOLL gasps because:

As if on laser-beam roller-skates, WHAM! she stands before him, not two feet away, as if instantly transported by miracles to slam into his vision!

DRISCOLL
...Genevieve?

GENEVIEVE
...Benjamin? Everything's ready!

She glances over her shoulder.

He adjusts his focus.

We see what he sees: The candlelight, the waiting dinner plates, the wine glasses, the wine!

His eyes flex and fasten on this.

GENEVIEVE smiles and lifts her hand in which is a computer control. She presses it.

From the shop front, MUSIC, WEDDING MUSIC, and a VOICE.

THE VOICE
Dearly beloved, we are gathered here to join in holy matrimony...

THE VOICE hesitates. An aching silence waiting to be filled.

GENEVIEVE beams. It is obvious from this that she has prepared a robot Virtual Reality matrimonial service.

THE VOICE (repeats)
...join in holy matrimony...

DRISCOLL weighs and measures the shop, the voice, and her.

DRISCOLL
Everything's ready?

She nods, excitedly, cheeks blushing.

DRISCOLL
Except one thing.

She blinks, wondering. After a long beat:

DRISCOLL
...Me!!!

He bounds back into the Jeep seat.

She is stunned.

GENEVIEVE
Benjamin Rhystkind!

DRISCOLL
Driscoll!

GENEVIEVE
What do you have to say for yourself?!

DRISCOLL (thinks, explodes)
Bye!

WHAM! THE JEEP rockets off down the empty street.

She screams:

GENEVIEVE
Rhyskind!

His voice echoes back in the wind.

DRISCOLL
...Driscoll...

And his Jeep diminishes out of town, lost in the desert on the road.

He rushes by town after town. As he passes, phones ring.

He looks over at the passing PHONE BOOTHS. Ring, ring, ring.

He puts on more speed.

PHONE BOOTH AFTER PHONE BOOTH, Ring...ring...ring.

He jumps the gas.

Leaving a LINE OF PHONES ringing, ringing, ringing, as he disappears over a hill, and only THE BOOTHS are there with their indignant sound.

As he moves, pursued by guilts and doubts, but nevertheless doubles his speed, we CUT TO:

Moving the other way, along a nearby canal, two loads of EARTHMEN, FAMILIES, four or five in the first boat, a half dozen in the second, the motor puttering quietly but swiftly.

CUT TO DRISCOLL full speed, sensing:

Behind him, SANDSHIPS, not escorting him but following at a safe distance, perhaps to protect him, should he need protection.

CUT BACK to the OUTBOARD MOTORS, THE FAMILIES with all their belongings, going somewhere.

On the banks as they pass, deserted towns.

Empty villages.

Abandoned rocket take-off sites.

Same with DRISCOLL, encountering and leaving empty places.

He stops at:

The small church of FATHER PEREGRINE and FATHER STONE.

DRISCOLL moves into the doorway. FATHER PEREGRINE is there, beckons silently and turns to look down the center aisle.

DRISCOLL sees what FATHER PEREGRINE sees:

The altar at the far end of the chapel.

ZOOM IN ON: The Martian Presence, the ambiance of fire, quietly pulsing and glowing there.

CLOSEUP OF PEREGRINE gazing at the soft blue light, loving its fire.

DRISCOLL senses what it is, glances from it to the enchanted PRIEST, looks back at the Martian Illumination, and crosses himself, and suddenly snaps his gaze, turns his head to see:

BANG! QUICK CUT TO the canal and three MOTORBOATS carrying WILDER and HIS FAMILY and OTHER EARTH FAMILIES, surfing the waters, FULL SPEED!

At the near horizon where, ZOOM IN, with a great roar and boom the MARTIAN SANDSHIPS lift their gossamer spider-silk sails to clamor the wind! It is like a summons!

DRISCOLL'S eyes fix on the armada of bright sails. His mouth shadows with approval. He gives a final glance in at the:

Burning light on the altar.

He crosses himself, turns to spy the SANDSHIPS, nods.

THE SANDSHIPS quake and bang their sails.

QUICK CUT TO DRISCOLL in his JEEP, smashing the wind.

And, in the canal, WILDER'S FAMILIES, hurtling forward.

DRISCOLL sees them, brakes the JEEP to a halt.

WILDER, in the first boat, cuts its engine, idles the craft, and calls over, surprised and pleased.

WILDER
Driscoll!

DRISCOLL
Captain Wilder. I'll be damned!

WILDER
I hope not. Where going?

DRISCOLL
Anywhere!

He glances back at GENEVIEVE'S memory, then reports.

DRISCOLL
Mars is evacuated. The colonies are deserted!

WILDER
We know, we know!

DRISCOLL
What about Earth?

WILDER
We don't know, we don't know!

DRISCOLL
A flood, a solar flare, a war, an atomic accident?

WILDER
God knows, we don't!

DRISCOLL
We're the only ones left on Mars. Why you?

WILDER glances at his family and friends in their boats.

WILDER
Someone must stay. If Earth is dead, we at least survive.
If we must, we'll start a new blood-line, why not?

He looks up at the sky and down into the crowded boats and back at the small towns they have abandoned.

WILDER
Our settlements are flimsy shacks, not meant to be permanent. They'll fall down in ten years. Up ahead...
(nods up the canal)
...there's a dead Martian town, empty villas built centuries ago that will last our lifetime. Lots of room for us.
(nods to his family and friends)
Well, Driscoll, will you join us?

DRISCOLL eyes the boats, the canal, the horizon.

Where THE SANDSHIPS boom the wind with their sails.
WILDER'S SON and DAUGHTER call from the boat.

THE DAUGHTER
We're going to find the Martians!

THE SON
Yeah!

DRISCOLL'S eyes stray and find:

In the third boat, A LOVELY YOUNG WOMAN who stands as if waiting.

DRISCOLL judges her, hesitates.

DRISCOLL
...well...

QUICK CUT to the JEEP, empty.

CUT TO the MOTORBOATS cutting the canal tides!

PHONES ring, ring, ring along the canals.

WILDER hears them, glances, comments.

WILDER
Someone answer those phones!

DRISCOLL, at the boat wheel, laughs, stomps the gas.

WHAM, the BOAT roars ahead!

As the MARTIAN SANDSHIPS glide on both sides of the canal, pacing them.

THE MOTORBOATS cut motors and drift to touch the dock of a silent and ancient Martian city.

THE SANDSHIPS quell their sails, whispering, waiting.

WILDER'S SON shades his eyes, peering.

THE SON
I can't see. Are the Martians there?

WILDER
Yes and no.

THE DAUGHTER
But you promised we'd meet them!

WILDER
And so you shall. Jump!

THE CHILDREN jump to the dock and as THE FAMILIES unload, hurry with WILDER up a deserted pathway among ancient structures in which old Martian library HARPBOOKS whisper and sing.

Behind them, THE FAMILIES are moving into empty dwellings.

DRISCOLL, at one doorsill, sees:

THE HANDSOME YOUNG WOMAN passing. She nods.

CUT TO: WILDER and HIS FAMILY arriving at a low dwelling, somehow familiar, resembling the house of crystal pillars where not so long ago YLL and YLLA lived out their lives.

WILDER'S WIFE enters. THE CHILDREN pull WILDER on.

THE SON
The Martians, dad!

THE DAUGHTER
Hurry up or we'll miss them!

WILDER (nods)
No, they'll be here a long while.

They arrive at the edge of a final canal. WILDER glances over at:

The MARTIAN SANDSHIPS, their bright sails filling and refilling with a quiet sussurance of wind.

THE SON looks around.

THE SON
Heck, I don't see anything.

THE DAUGHTER
Show us!

WILDER looks at the horizon.

And THE SANDSHIPS there with the pilots in GOLDEN MASKS.
WILDER lifts his head as if to ask their agreement.

THE GOLDEN MASKS nod back.
Seeing this, WILDER touches HIS CHILDREN'S shoulders and points down.

WILDER
There. There are the Martians. For the next year and a hundred years and a thousand years after that.

HIS SON AND DAUGHTER stare down into the water.

The Martians are there. Themselves. Their reflections in the cold tide, gently trembling, gazing back up at them.

THE CHILDREN, astonished but at last understanding, look upon themselves and their future.

Their reflections, vibrant and half-smiling, gaze back up at them.

CUT TO: THE SANDSHIPS.

In the prows, the MARTIAN PILOTS look and see:

At a distance, WILDER and HIS CHILDREN by the canal's rim, gazing down into the waters.

The sails boom and thunder. THE SANDSHIPS sail away, surfing the desert sands.

And THE CAMERA pulls away and away, up the air over the lost city and the empty houses, and WILDER and his SON and DAUGHTER on the canal rim, growing small, smaller, smallest, and THE CAMERA keeps soaring higher, higher.

As the shadow of night moves across the land and a single light comes on in one of those abandoned homes. Is it WILDER'S place? DRISCOLL'S? We cannot see.

For THE CAMERA pulls further up until MARS is a great crimson disc as these words appear:

THE MARTIAN CHRONICLES

And then these final words:

THE BEGINNING

FADE OUT to wind and blowing sand and the soft chiming and singing of the ancient library HARPBOOKS sounding in the night.

DISSOLVE TO DARK.

FINIS

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Script for a movie of *The Martian Chronicles* (circa 1964) appears here for the first time.

Script for a movie of *The Martian Chronicles* (circa 1997) appears here for the first time.

Sam's
Sam's
HOT DOGS
HOT DOGS
DRINKS

The Martian Chronicles:
THE COMPLETE EDITION
BY RAY BRADBURY

In the course of his long, illustrious career, Ray Bradbury has created some of the most memorable and enduring fiction of our time. While no one work can adequately represent the range and depth of his achievement, it may well be that *The Martian Chronicles* will come to stand as his most singular accomplishment. A visionary account of the first attempt to extend the human enterprise to another planet, this unique and resonant book is both a seminal work of science fiction and a permanent addition to modern popular culture.

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